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**Women in crofting in Shetland from the 1930s to the present day: a
reciprocal relationship**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Faculty of Arts, Culture and Heritage
UHI Millennium Institute**

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the role of women in Shetland in crofting from the 1930s to the present day. I analyse the changing nature of women's participation in crofting in Shetland during this period, and the changing impact that crofting has had in structuring the identity of Shetland women. Explored against a backdrop of profound communication and technological developments, it is evident that whilst crofting continues to exert a significant influence on women's lives at the start of the new millennium, the meanings that women attach to crofting have shifted since the 1930s. At a conceptual level, it is evident that crofting is actively involved in the structuring of social relations. It is characterised by a high degree of fluidity, which allows women to define it in a variety of ways in relation to other aspects of their lives. However, the connotations associated with crofting are not limitless, and 'being a crofter' requires an appropriation of a particular set of values associated with 'tradition', 'family' and a 'crofting way of life'.

I explore in detail the nature of Shetland women's croft work, and the ways in which they contextualize crofting in relation to other aspects of their lives. The ways in which gender relations are structured in relation to crofting constitutes a major theme. This analysis challenges several popular 'myths' about Shetland women and crofting, such as the fact that Shetland society 'of the past' is perceived to be more 'egalitarian' than mainland Scottish society. I also explore the role of 'myths' in influencing the ways in which individual women think, and talk, about their lives in crofting and show that, in many cases, popularised 'communal stories' of crofting are accorded a higher value by women in comparison to their own personal experiences of crofting which may fail to live up to the 'ideal'

Crofting in Shetland is explored in the context of shifting policy developments since the 1930s, with a particular emphasis on recent policy directives. This thesis has an applied value as it provides an exploration of the ways in which younger women in Shetland respond to recent, and proposed future, policies. With specific reference to recent developments in crofting, including a focus on more inclusive rural development policies and a focus on diversification and environmentally friendly agriculture, I suggest that women in Shetland will potentially identify themselves more clearly as 'crofters', as the definition of 'crofter' changes, than they have done for much of the twentieth century.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my supervisors, Professor John Bryden, Dr Simon Clarke, Dr Sharon Macdonald and Dr Gillian Munro for providing advice and support throughout the PhD. Gillian Munro has been an invaluable sounding board and has gone way beyond the call of duty in her supervisory capacity. Thankyou to Dr Lynn Abrams who has discussed various aspects of Shetland women's history with me. Brian Smith and Angus Johnson, archivist and assistant archivist respectively at Shetland Archives, assisted me greatly whilst I was conducting fieldwork in Shetland.

I owe an immeasurable debt to all the women who participated in my interviews. In an effort to preserve their identities, I will not name individuals, but would like to thank them collectively for giving up their time and providing me with considerable hospitality.

Finally, thanks to the three people who have made this research project a more feasible and enjoyable experience than it otherwise might have been. My mother, Rhona Jack, who has provided an unwavering source of emotional and practical support from day one of the project, and to whom I owe my initial awareness of 'Shetland'. Josie Goudie, who was the best substitute 'granny' that my son, Duncan, could have had whilst in Shetland. By extension, her husband Robert Goudie, my mother's cousin, deserves a thankyou for sharing his dinner with Duncan many nights and for introducing him to tractors and quads. Lastly, thanks to my son, Duncan Jack, who was my constant little companion during fieldwork and who has made the last three years extremely enjoyable

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I wish to state why this research project was undertaken and to define the primary aims and objectives of research. These are:

1. To explore the shifting role of crofting in structuring the identity of women in Shetland from the 1930s to the present day.
2. To explore the development of a dominant local discourse of ‘Shetland crofting women’ and the implications this has as a reinterpretation of ‘the past’ and for women currently crofting in Shetland.
3. To explore the significance of crofting to younger women at the present day, and to explore their potential future roles in crofting.

I will contextualize this project in relation to other research, particularly in the fields of crofting research, rural sociology, gender history and anthropology, and show how it builds upon, complements and progresses existing knowledge in several areas. This project has an applied value in addressing several contemporary rural sociological issues in addition to providing a historical trajectory of women’s lives in Shetland.

Firstly, I will outline the instigation for the overall research project which was, in its original inception, designed to explore the participation of women in crofting from the 1930s to the present day. Secondly, I will show why I chose to focus on women in *Shetland* prior to a discussion of the implications this choice has had for the design of this project. The structure of this introductory chapter reflects the

qualitative approach I have adopted (chapter 2) which is influenced by the concept of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I have attempted to adopt an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Morser, 1994; Janesick, 1998), forming new questions as a result of on-going literature reviews and continuing fieldwork. This introduction highlights the reciprocal relationship between the various aspects of fieldwork, literature reviews and writing and acknowledges my input as a person as opposed to objective social scientist. In it I address the *process* of research and will present the aims and objectives as a journey as opposed to a pre-determined set of questions.

Finally I will offer a brief guide to the layout of the thesis and attempt to show how the different chapters relate to each other in order to address the research issues.

This chapter focuses clearly on *why* research was undertaken and the emergence of the project. *How* I have conducted research (the methodology) is discussed in chapter 2.

1.2 Instigation for research

In this section I will explore the instigation for undertaking research. I will firstly discuss the instigation for undertaking research into ‘women and crofting from the 1930s to the present day: perceptions of continuity and change’, as the project was originally conceived. This discussion highlights the importance of women in crofting, whilst contextualising Shetland women’s experiences within wider

discussions of crofting issues. I will show how, as a result of a literature review of feminist theory/ methodology (e.g: Scott, 1988; Frager, 1999), the focus of the original research question shifted to encompass an exploration of the ways in which crofting structures women's identities as gendered beings, which has become the central research issue. A continuing literature review in the field of feminist rural sociology demonstrated the need to explore gender divisions and inequalities that previous research has revealed are evident within many 'family farming' systems (Whatmore, 1991; Alston, 1995), and which have significant implications for women's roles in farming and their, and others', perceptions of themselves as agriculturalists (Sachs, 1983; Gasson, et. al., 1992).

1.2.1 Instigation for research into 'The participation of women in crofting from the 1930s to the present day': aims and objectives

The project was originally conceived as one of several potential University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHIMI) research topics that arose as a result of a research conference held in 1998. The instigation for research, as based on the original panel's recommendations, recognised the fact that women had always played a central role in crofting, but that their experiences had been largely ignored in accounts of crofting and Highlands and Islands agriculture in general. It was promoted by the desire to gain an understanding of changes within crofting communities as they adapted to changes from a predominantly agricultural to a wage-earning, multi-occupational structure and the basic need to acknowledge women's contribution to crofting.

Prior to discussing the reasons for focussing on the lives of *Shetland* women and

crofting, I will focus on the instigation behind the original project. ‘Women in crofting from the 1930s to the present day: perceptions on continuity and change’ has three elements that are usefully discussed individually in order to define the aims and objectives of research. Firstly, I will discuss the main reasons for undertaking research into *crofting*. Secondly, I will discuss why *women* in crofting were selected for research. Finally, I will discuss the instigation for conducting research into the period ‘the 1930s to the present day’.

1.2.1.1 Instigation for research into crofting

In this section, I will explore the main instigation for conducting research into crofting. I will review the work of other researchers in this field, in an attempt to contextualize this project in relation to previous research. Given the primary theme of this project, which is to explore the meanings that women attach to crofting, and the impact it has in structuring their identity, this review focussed on exploring the ‘meanings’ of crofting that are explicitly, or, more commonly, implicitly evident in ‘popular’ histories and ‘official’ crofting literature. I will then review recent anthropological research, which has revealed the multiplicity of meanings that people attach to crofting, and its symbolic role in structuring social relations at various levels.

Prior to this review, I will offer a brief definition of crofting and its historical development up to the present day.

Definition and origination

As the proceeding discussion demonstrates, attempting to ‘define’ crofting is not an easy task. Whilst the complexity of what crofting *is* becomes apparent below, I wish here to provide a simplified overview of crofting’s origins, historical development and contemporary practice, with a focus on its agricultural aspect. This is not intended to represent a comprehensive history of crofting, which is well covered elsewhere (e.g: Hunter 1976; 1991). Rather, it is intended to provide a basic starting point for the discussion of other complex issues.

A ‘croft’ is an agricultural holding that comes under the remit of crofting tenure and legislation. ‘Crofting’ operates predominantly as a form of part-time agriculture, located in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the ‘crofting counties’ of Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness and Argyll (Figure 1). There are about 17,725 crofts (The Crofters Commission, 2003), of which approximately 3,500 are owner-occupied, with the vast majority being tenanted (The Scottish Parliament, 2000). These crofts are occupied by approximately 11,500 crofting households, representing the fact that a single crofter may hold several crofts, which, although they may be amalgamated into a single larger agricultural unit, are still defined as individual crofts. About 33,000 people live in croft households (The Crofters Commission, 2003). The main concentrations of crofts are in the Western Isles (6,000), on Skye and some other islands of the inner Hebrides (1,840), Shetland (2,700) and on the north and west coast of the Scottish mainland (2,300), (The Scottish Parliament, 2000). The mean average size of a croft is 5 hectares (The Crofters Commission, 2003), but crofts range in size from 0.5 hectare to 50 hectares, plus a share in hill

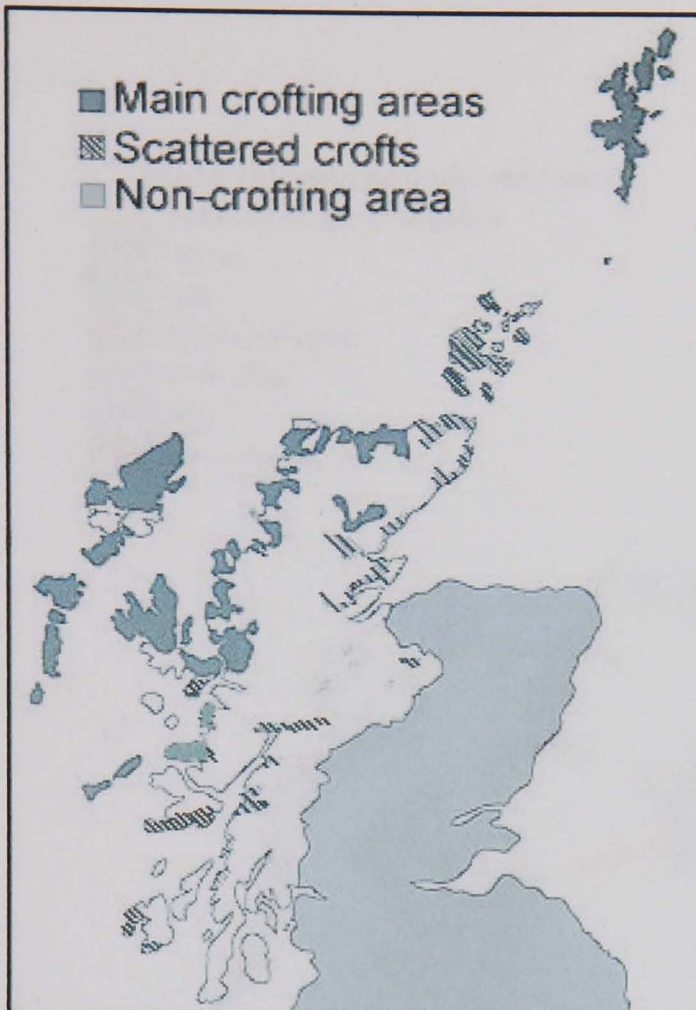


Figure 1: Map of crofting regions

(Source: Scottish Crofters Foundation, 2003)

grazing (The Crofters Commission, 2003). The ‘north-west’ region, which comprises Shetland, Orkney, Highland and the Western Isles (Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department) (SEERAD) is predominantly based on crofting agriculture, dominated by sheep production and identified as a Less Favoured Area (LFA) by (SEERAD, 2003) (Figure 2). Figures 3 (appendix 1) and 4 (appendix 2) show variation in croft size in absolute and percentage terms, based on SEERAD’s Economic Report on Scottish Agriculture 2003 Edition (SEERAD, 2003). As such, the figures do not incorporate Argyll, which is also a crofting area, but as Figure 2 shows, this region is characterised by predominantly dairy agriculture, with scattered crofts, and its inclusion would ‘skew’ the figures based on a comparison of holdings in the main crofting areas.

Figures 3 and 4 show that the majority of agricultural units in the north-west

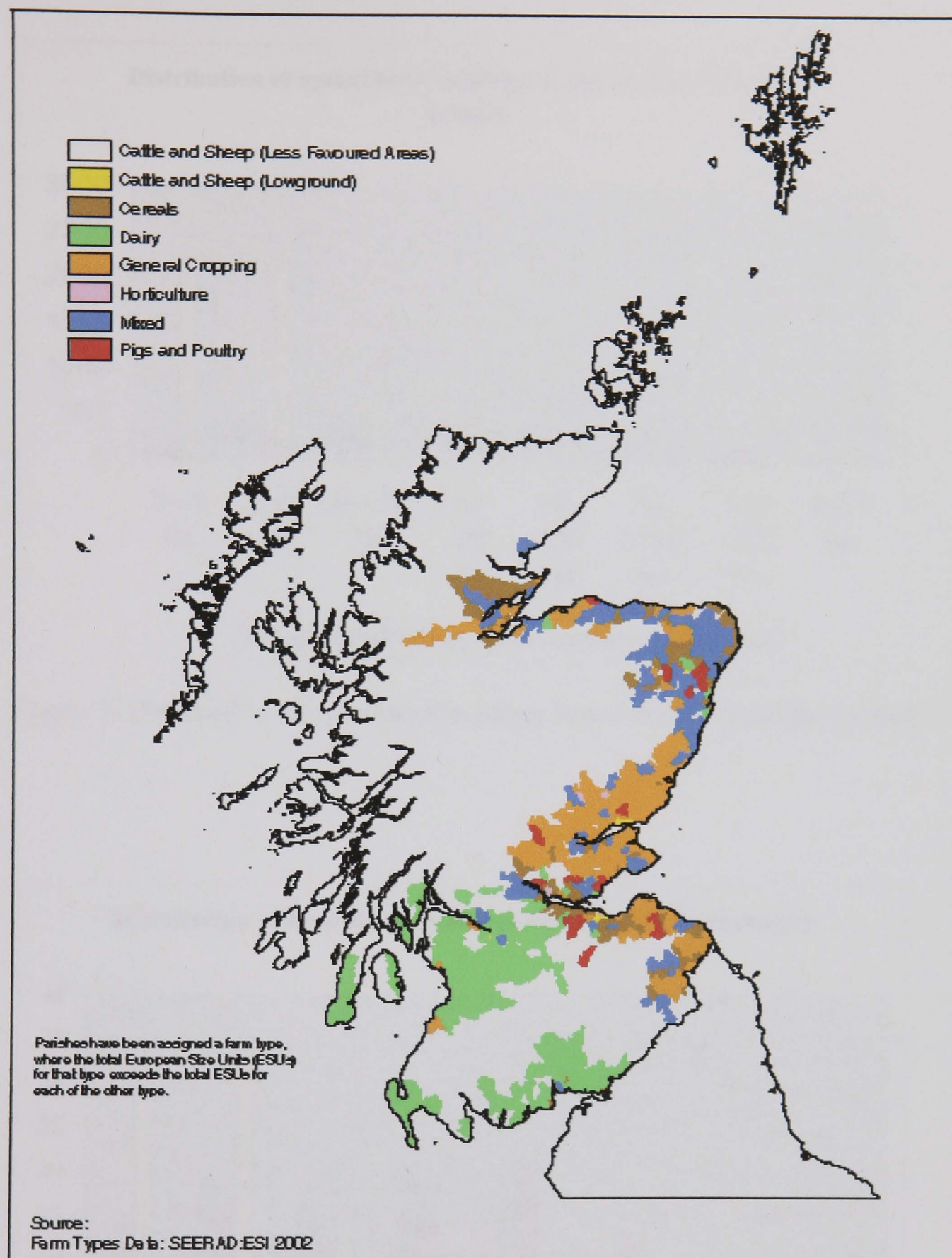


Figure 2: Map of variation in agricultural activity type

region are less than 10 hectares in area. However, Shetland and Orkney have a proportionately higher percentage of crofts between 20 – 50 hectares. The smallest crofts are distributed predominantly in the Highland region and the Western Isles, but Highland region also has the largest percentage of holdings

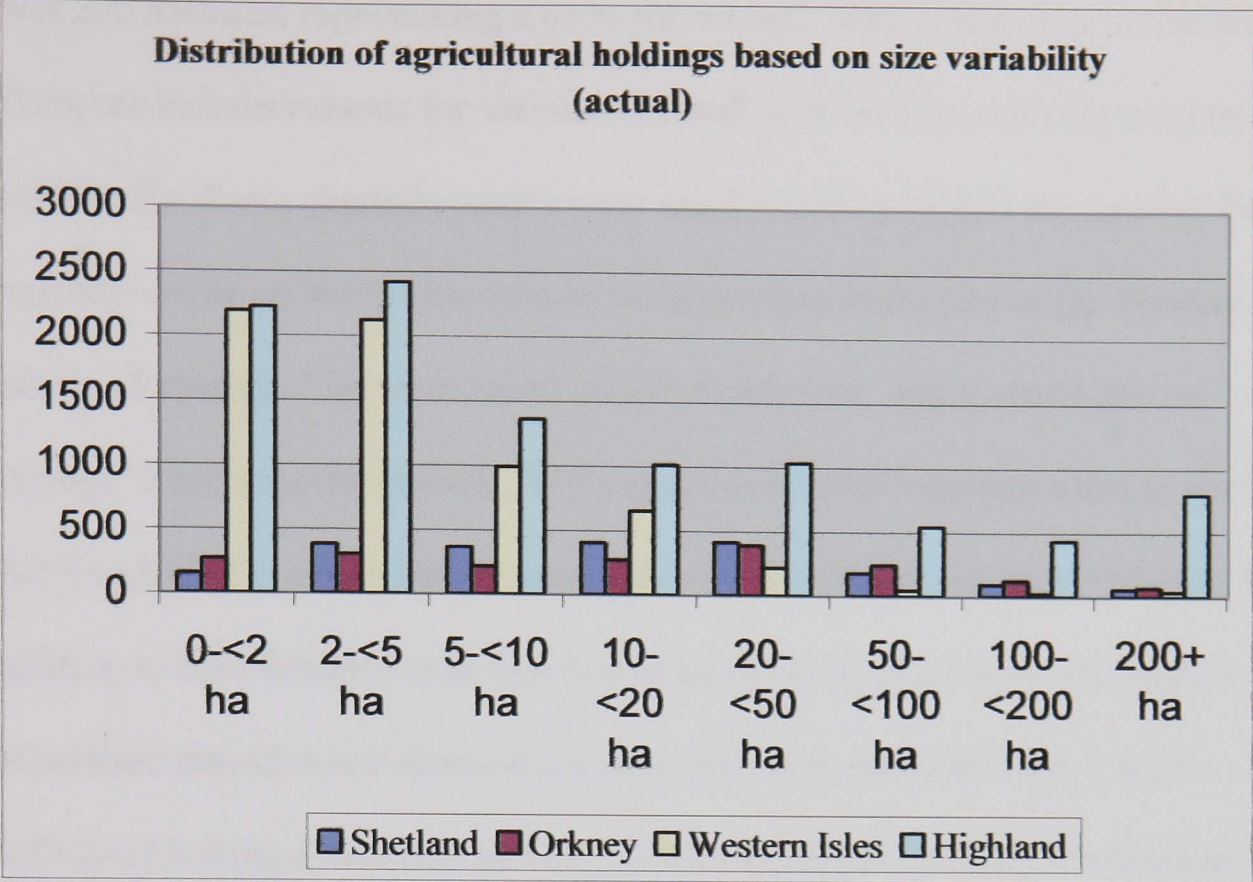


Figure 3: Distribution of agricultural holdings based on size variability (actual)

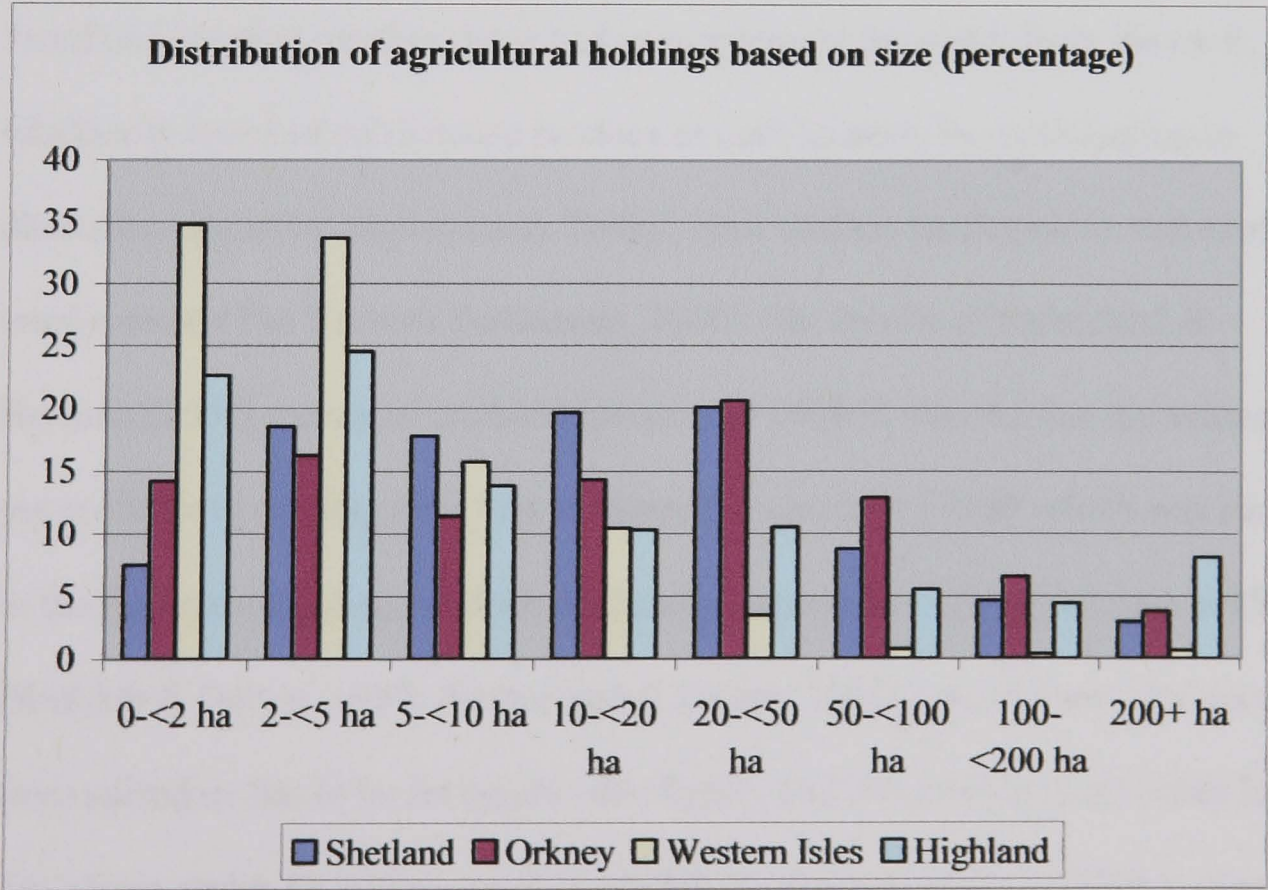


Figure 4: Distribution of agricultural holdings based on size (percentage)

over 200 hectares, representing a more mixed agricultural economy in this area. There are various reasons for variation in croft size, and the statistics used to produce the above charts to some extent mask variation within the regions. For instance, crofts on North Uist tend to be larger than in the rest of the Western Isles, and average 7 hectares, compared to South Uist, where crofts are, on average, 5 hectares (Bramwell, 1997). Bramwell (1997) attributes this to the fact that South Uist is a more fertile area with access to big expanses of machair. In addition to land fertility, croft size is also linked to its local historical origins, population densities and demand for land, and alternative land use. Larger individual holdings may also be explained by the apportionment of common grazings which has been pursued to a greater extent in some areas than others and is, for instance, a common practice in Shetland.

From its inception, crofters have had to supplement the yields from the croft, whether in terms of subsistence produce or cash income, by participating in alternative forms of employment. Today, most crofters participate in non-croft employment (The Scottish Parliament, 2000). The results of Sutherland & Bevan's (2001) survey of crofters' incomes in 1998/9, showed that the average net profit from crofting activities amounted to less than £1000, which was similar to the figure revealed by Kinloch & Dalton's survey of crofters' income in 1988/9 (Kinloch & Dalton, 1989). Sutherland & Bevan (2001) note that crofters' income from subsidies has to be set against this figure, and that receipt of subsidies had risen from under £2,500 per croft in 1988/9 (Kinloch & Dalton, 1989) to over £4,700 in 1998/9. The average croft income in 1998/9 was £15,289, revealing that the vast majority of crofters' income was derived from non-croft activity.

Crofting emerged as an agricultural system in the Highlands and Islands from the mid-late eighteenth century onwards (Hunter, 1976), with its precise form and date of origin varying between locality. Crofting's origins must be contextualized in relation to wider socio-economic, and particularly agricultural, developments of the time. Specifically, crofting's origins were due to a dramatic shift away from an older tradition of social relations in the Highlands. Its origins must be contextualized within a move to an increasingly important money economy and the desire of landlords to maximise the potential income available from their land by exploiting new agricultural practices. On the one hand, this led to the notorious Highland Clearances, and the displacement of large numbers of tenants from their traditional holdings to make way for sheep. Not only did sheep farmers pay higher rents to landlords, but, as one sheep farmer typically displaced dozens of tenants, a shift to this system meant that landlords could manage their estates more easily and economically (Hunter, 1999). Displaced tenants commonly either emigrated, abroad or to the industrial areas of Lowland Scotland, or were re-instated by landlords on 'crofts'. Crofts were landholdings which were specifically designed to be small in size, and were often on the least productive land, requiring the participation of crofters in activities that directly benefited landlords. As Hunter states, 'From the perspective of the landlords who ordered their creation, crofts served a range of useful purposes' (1999 p.246). These purposes were subject to regional variation. For instance, in Shetland, crofting was pioneered in connection with the *haaf* (deep sea) fishery. Crofts were deliberately designed by landlords to be insufficient in providing for a family's subsistence and rent requirements, requiring the participation of men in other wage earning capacities. In addition to the need to supplement the croft's produce, there was in Shetland a 'continued

system of compulsion' (Hunter, 1999 p.230), by which tenants were forced to participate in the *haaf* fishery and sell their catches to their landlords, who then made considerable profits from the enterprise. If they failed to participate in this system, the crofter would face eviction. In Moray, Easter Inverness-shire, Easter Ross and Caithness, crofters were usually provided with previously uncultivated moor or hillside land which, once brought into a productive state by the crofter's efforts, was usually added to a larger farm, with the process being repeated for the crofter who was displaced to a new 'croft' (Hunter, 1999). In some areas, such as Easter Ross and Caithness, crofters often doubled as farm labourers. Elsewhere, in Orkney, the Hebrides and the Highland mainland's Atlantic seaboard, crofting's origins were entwined with the development of the kelp industry¹ which provided a significant source of landlord revenue. In a similar situation to the Shetland *haaf* system, crofter-kelpers were obliged to surrender their kelp to their landlords who were decreed as its owners. Thus, whilst its precise manifestation was different in different places, crofting originated throughout the region as a system of landholdings designed to be insufficient to provide for a family's needs, and which required the participation of men, as well as women and children in some spheres, in industries that served the needs of the landlords.

The Crofters Wars/ Land Wars of the 1880s have received considerable attention elsewhere (e.g: Hunter, 1976; Richards, 1982; Devine, 1994) and I will only briefly discuss them here, primarily to show how crofting has developed in a particular way since the passing of a Crofters Act in 1886. Following about a century of crofting in some areas, which included a series of famines in the mid nineteenth century and at a time when anti-landlord agitation was occurring in

Ireland, Highland crofters during the 1880s set out to challenge the way they were treated. Their grievances included existing tenurial measures, by which crofters tenanted their holdings on a year to year basis and were vulnerable to eviction. They were also subject to arbitrarily imposed rent increases. Their major grievance stemmed from the fact that, due to the earlier Clearances, crofters had been left with far less land than sheep farmers who were situated on land which had previously been tenanted by the crofters' forebears. Following a series of disturbances, the 'Crofters Wars', and the commissioning of a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the State of Crofting Conditions, chaired by Lord Napier, the Crofters Act of 1886 was passed. Whilst this Act failed to meet all the demands of crofters, it had a significant short and long term impact on crofting. The 1886 Act provided security of tenure for all crofters, rendering them free from eviction. It provided them with the capacity to transfer tenancies to their heirs. It fixed 'fair rents'. From a longer term perspective, it effectively removed power from the landlords and, instead, situated crofting within a particular relationship with 'the State'. Subsequent Acts, which are inherently entwined with the political circumstances of the time (see below), have reinforced crofting's unique tenurial and legislative status. Today, for instance, in addition to qualifying for the usual Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies, crofters also qualify for a unique set of grants, namely the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (Scotland) Scheme (CCAGS), which is a grant scheme for various aspects of agricultural improvements, and the Crofters Building Grants and Loan Scheme (CBGLS), which is a grant and loan scheme for domestic dwellings. The Crofters Commission, which was established in 1955, has a wide ranging remit of powers with regard to crofters' rights and the provision of crofting grants. For instance,

with the exception of ‘assigning’ (bequeathing) croft tenancies to other family members, the Commission has to approve assignments. Where crofts are not being worked, as in the case of absentee tenants, the Commission has the ability to take the croft from the crofter. The Commission is responsible for approving or rejecting CCAGS and CBGLS applications. Thus the crofter is a tenant who, in order to maintain his/ her tenancy and qualify for the unique grants which are available, has to operate in accordance with Crofters Commission ‘rules’ who, in crofter ideology, in terms of the ways they perceive controls and constraints on their activities, have to some extent taken over the role of the previous landlords.

Whilst crofting’s development throughout the Highlands and Islands during the twentieth century is as varied as its origins, some general trends are evident throughout the region, in addition to the fact that crofters are subject to the same legislative remits. Firstly, crofting has remained, for the vast majority, a form of part-time agriculture which has had to be supplemented by the participation of crofters in paid employment, a situation directly traceable to its origins. Secondly, there has been a general shift, evident throughout the crofting region, away from the production of a wide range of subsistence produce towards a concentration on sheep production (Mewett, 1977; Ennew, 1980). Sutherland and Bevan’s (2001) survey showed that, since Kinloch & Dalton’s (1989) survey ten years previously, the proportion of crofters with cows on their croft had fallen from 64% to 29%, whilst the number of ewes on the crofts had risen by 17%. This trend, which is partly due to post World War II agricultural policy which has encouraged the development of larger units, has often led to the amalgamation of individual crofts into larger units which are effectively run as ‘sheep farms’ (chapters 4 & 6).

Thirdly, and especially since the World War II, crofting has become increasingly mechanised, leading to a transformation in the nature of croft work, which has had major implications for the degree and type of work done by women (Chapter 4). Finally, crofting's development in the twentieth century has been entwined with changing employment patterns, of both men and women, which are due to wider socio-economic developments. This includes both non-croft employment and non-agricultural activities conducted on-croft. Sutherland & Bevan's (2001) survey revealed a 150% increase in participation of non-farm activities on the croft in compared to Kinloch & Dalton's (1989) findings. The increase was mainly in the provisions of facilities and services for tourism. Throughout the crofting region, contractors are increasingly used (e.g: for clipping sheep and silage making) and there has been an increased participation in diversification and agri-environmental schemes (The Scottish Parliament, 2000).

A popular discourse of crofting: representations in popular histories

A review of 'popular' histories of crofting allows an exploration into some of the meanings that are popularly associated with crofting, and how it is situated in relation to wider discourses. By 'popular' histories, I refer to those that are intended for, and read by, wider-than-academic audiences. The term is not used in a derogatory way, or to imply that these publications necessarily lack academic value when some, particularly Hunter's (1976; 1991; 1999), represent highly scholarly and well researched pieces of work. Popular histories of crofting tend to be written from a pro-crofter/ Highlander stance, reflecting the fact that many represent local histories written from a personalised, local perspective. This has led to criticism of some 'popular' historians by economic historians of the period

as over-romanticising the pre-Clearance conditions and in being too emotive in their analyses (see Hunter's preface to the new edition of the *Making of the Crofting Community*, published 2000, for a discussion of this debate). Hunter (2000) explicitly outlines his 'personal' relationship with the subject matter and addresses the biases he brings to research. For the majority of publications, however, authors' values, biases and attitudes are implicit within the text.

It is precisely *because* these accounts are written from an emotive, biased stance that they are useful in revealing the kinds of meanings that people attach to crofting. By not attempting to divorce themselves from subjective views of crofting, from a popularly held and potentially idealised version of crofting history, in the attempt to produce a 'value free' account, they allow analysis of some of the attitudes and values that are *popularly* associated with crofting. Hunter suggests that *The Making of the Crofting Community* was intended to bridge the 'credibility gap...between 'the crofter's conception of his own past' and 'the typical historian's portrayal of it'' (2000 p.20). He goes on to state,

my own sympathy with crofters, whether past or present, could be deduced from a casual reading...that sympathy, however, has not taken the form of uncritically reproducing crofters' understandably prejudiced view of their own history. Rather, as indicated at the outset, it has taken the form of explaining their view (ibid, 2000 p.289).

Whilst the majority of these sources lack Hunter's reflexive insight, and may, indeed represent an 'uncritical reproduction of crofter's views', it is at this level that they are revealing. The popularity of these sources, to both crofting and non-crofting audiences, means that not only do they represent an embodiment of

popular discourses about crofting but, as a result of textual reproduction, the messages they contain are reiterated as they are read by people.

The types of meanings of crofting that are evident from a review of these popular sources focus on some dominant themes, as defined below.

A heroic past

One common theme is the discourse of a heroic past, specifically in relation to the Crofters Wars/ Land Wars of the 1880s. Whilst crofting is, on the one hand, lamented as an outcome of the Clearances, the Crofters Wars offer the opportunity to celebrate the resistance and resurgence of the oppressed Highlander. This theme has received a disproportionate amount of attention in popular histories of crofting and the 1886 Act, the culmination of the crofters struggles, has been celebrated in exhibitions, such as *As An Fhearann*, the re-printing of some classic texts about the subject (see Macdonald 1997), and in a number of commemorative publications (e.g: Graham, L., 1987). Parman notes the significance of this Act to crofters and states that ‘The Crofters Act of 1886, from the crofter’s point of view, has the symbolic significance of the Magna Carta, and stories are told about that period as if it happened yesterday’ (1990 p.65).

The relevance of the crofting past to the present, and the future

The second dominant theme, partly related to the celebration of Crofters Wars, is the lessons that can be gleaned from crofters in the past in seeking solutions to contemporary problems facing people in the Highlands and Islands. The ‘crofter of the past’, particularly with reference to the Crofters Wars, is actively invoked

as a metaphor. Some writers explicitly call on contemporary crofters to ‘learn’ from their crofting ancestors. Thus, in his foreword to a book celebrating the centenary of the Crofting Act of 1886 (Graham, L., 1987) in Shetland, Hunter writes, ‘In the 1980s, as much as in the 1880s, crofting faces enormous challenges. In the 1980s, as much as in the 1880s, crofters will surmount these challenges only if they act collectively’ (1987, foreword). In a similar vein Willis states,

While anchored to the land over which their ancestors fought so vigorously in the nineteenth century, crofters are being called upon to respond to changing situations and opportunities and above all to maintain a way of living that is sustainable. That they are capable of rising to a challenge has been demonstrated many times in the past. As the twenty-first century unfolds, this distinctive style of living is clearly set to continue (2001, p.163).

A complex interplay between past, present and the potential future of crofting is evident. On the one hand, ‘the past’, in its glorified and idealised state, is invoked as a metaphor for solving contemporary problems. On the other, the interpretation of crofting ‘of the past’ is inherently entwined with contemporary discourses (e.g: Thomson, 1984; Hunter, 1991; Willis, 2001). Macdonald (1997) notes that the resurgence of interest in, and publications on, the period of the Clearances and early crofting history, from the 1960s onwards, coincided with an increasing sense of Scottish nationalism, and reflected contemporary concerns.

A unique and worthy culture

Evident within these popular histories of crofting is the inherent assumption that the Highland and Island crofting community represents a unique culture, and one

which is worthy of preservation and, particularly when contrasted to modern urban society. This contrast is evident from Thomson's definition of crofting as 'a storehouse for residual moral and social values from which the nation as a whole can draw when these become debased in anonymous urban societies (1984 p.45). Crofting is represented as embodying a 'way of life' which is traditional in nature and based on intrinsically worthwhile values, such as 'community', 'co-operative working', 'tradition' and 'family'. The positioning of crofting in this type of 'value system' is evident from Willis' statement that,

Viewed from today's perspective, amidst the excesses of an affluent society, we may judge that the crofter folk were poor, endowed with little in material terms. Yet what they did possess was an expression of a distinctive culture, something that was rich in a different kind of way (2001 p.99).

Popular histories abound with statements about the crofting 'way of life', and a common theme is the potential threats to this way of life. Thus, with reference to the idea of communal working, which is seen as intrinsic to the crofting way of life, Thomson states, 'a crofter owning his own tractor has a degree of independence which is foreign to the whole concept of crofting as a way of life' (1984 p.34).

A traditional part of Highland and Island culture

As shown above, crofting represented a disruption, from the eighteenth century onwards, of a much older social and agricultural system. However, in popular discourses of crofting, it is represented as being synonymous with 'traditional' Highland and Island culture. Some writers, such as Willis (2001) attempt to situate crofting in the context of a much older past, in order to demonstrate its 'authenticity'. In one chapter, entitled 'Echoes of the Past', Willis commences

with an exploration of the Neolithic period and states that, ‘Skara Brae in Orkney, Jarlshof in Shetland and Dun Carloway in Lewis...provide much to interest those who would seek out some links with today’s crofting stock and their traditions’ (ibid p.22).

Impact on this project

This review of popular crofting histories has shown the types of beliefs and attitudes that people may attach to crofting and has demonstrated the need to explore what crofting *means* to people over and above the physical part they may play in it. It has also shown the importance of exploring people’s perceptions of the past as being inherently entwined with contemporary values and attitudes. The manifestation and impact of a ‘popular’ discourse of crofting is explored in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 focuses on the ways in which individual women’s accounts are shaped with reference to an idealised, popularised discourse of crofting women in Shetland. Chapter 5 explores the development of this discourse, and how it is employed within the context of ‘Shetland’s’ contemporary interests.

Anthropological research

In this section, I will review recent anthropological research into crofting. With one exception (Brown, A., 1997) this research is not *specifically* into ‘crofting’ but has been conducted within crofting communities. This field of research has, to varying degrees, explored the ‘meanings’ that people attach to crofting and the role it plays in social discourse.

Crofting as social discourse.

Anthropological research within the Highlands and Islands has primarily taken the form of community studies (e.g: Mewett, 1982a; 1982b; Parman, 1990; Macdonald, 1997). This type of analysis has revealed that crofting is imbued with symbolic significance, over and above its economic/ agricultural role, and is central in the articulation of social discourse, both at inter and intra- community levels, as well as at a wider regional level. Cohen (1982; 1987) identifies 'crofting' as being one of the ways in which local people experience 'belonging' to Whalsay, the Shetland island community where his research was conducted. Through participation in crofting, in terms of croft work, as well as in other ways such as living within a 'crofting community', and inhabiting croft holdings which are associated with previous generations, 'crofting' becomes deeply embedded within Whalsay social relations. Cohen states his instigation for undertaking research was to,

describe the ways in which Whalsay people see themselves and others as belonging to Whalsay...My object here is less to describe the structures of social organisation in Whalsay than to show how they are perceived and used by Whalsay people themselves: it is to identify the ideology of close social association (1982 p.21).

Crofting, in conjunction with other factors, emerges as one of Cohen's 'structures of social organisation' that are perceived, and used, by Whalsay people in defining themselves and others as 'belonging'. A similar approach is evident in the approach adopted by Mewett who states,

My concern is to understand 'community' through the stock of knowledge people use to inform and guide everyday behaviour...this is used to

understand how boundaries are constructed as part of the shared meanings of everyday behaviour and within the context of the social relations of everyday life (1982a p.72).

Crofting, in this context, can be considered as part of the 'shared meanings of everyday behaviour'. Both Cohen (1979) and Macdonald (1997) show how croft work is entwined with a sense of male identity. With particular reference to 'communal', but very predominantly male, participation at sheep *fanks*², Macdonald states,

Through crofting men gain access not only to one of the most significant reference groups, but also to the political institution of the township, and to the ideal of egalitarianism and its connotations of 'the people' and radical history. This is something which is partly shaped through an opposition with women (Macdonald, 1997 p.123).

In addition to exploring the symbolic role of crofting at an inter-community level, Macdonald (1997) also explores the symbolic role of crofting at an intra-community level, as a means to distinguish between crofters and 'others'. She states, 'The set of ideas about the 'crofting community' born in the rhetoric of the Land Wars...fosters symbolic oppositions between crofters and 'away', and within Carnan between locals and incomers' (ibid p.115). Renwanz (1981) shows that crofting is entwined with a sense of 'Cunningsburgher' identity, as well as a sense of 'Shetland' identity, that comprises part of a wider repertoire of symbols that distinguished Shetlanders from non-Shetlanders, and which was most marked at a time when they felt their 'crofting way of life' to be under threat as the result of oil developments. The idea that crofting may be entwined with a sense of national identity in Shetland is explored by Church (1990), who suggests that a

reinterpretation of ‘traditional’ crofting, which is imbued with positive local values, is bound with a discourse of Shetland nationalism.

Fluid concept, but with limited connotations

Anthropological research has revealed that the meanings that crofters attach to crofting are ‘fluid’ to the extent that they can be renegotiated to accommodate changing circumstances (Cohen, 1987; Macdonald, 1997). The meanings that people attach to crofting also depend on factors such as age, gender, whether they are ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’, and wider social and political contemporary issues (Condry, 1980; Renwanz, 1981; Cohen, 1987; Brown, A., 1997; Macdonald, 1997). However, as research from different localities, conducted at different times, has revealed, the repertoire of meanings that people attach to crofting is not limitless. Macdonald states,

There is...a particular constellation of associations made between ‘crofters’, ‘the people’, land, being of the place, way of life, opposition to ‘away’ and the powers-that-be, and at least some renditions of masculine identity...The metaphors and everyday practice through which identities are articulated are not, however, fixed. Nor are they completely fluid and changeable. Rather, they are created in relation to the repertoire of possibilities available, a repertoire which itself changes as new variations are tried and fed back into the set of possibilities (1997 p.p.124-125).

The role of crofting in social discourse, and the symbolic structuring of identity, at various levels, was explored above. Other meanings such as crofting’s role as a link to the past, and its association with ‘traditional’ values, which are inherently

entwined with the articulation of social discourse, are equally important. Cohen states,

The croft is an anchor: spatially, it keeps people *in situ*, on the same small patch of land which has been occupied by generations of their antecedents; symbolically and ideologically, it provides a sense of cultural continuity amidst the flux of modern economic and technological life (1987 p.108).

Crofting, in terms of practice and place symbolically represents a link with a more 'traditional' 'way of life' which can be contrasted with the perception of the degeneration of 'values' in urban society (Condry, 1980; Macdonald, 1997). Both Renwanz (1981) and Church (1990) demonstrate that crofting in Shetland is imbued with 'positive', 'traditional' values which are represented in contemporary discourses as embodying a worthwhile, traditional and authentic 'way of life'. Ennew states, 'Crofting as a legally defined category is less than a century old. Yet it is the crofting way of life which is often assumed to be the basis of the traditional form which is opposed conceptually to modernity' (1980, p.14).

Communities confronting change

One theme of anthropological research in Highland and Island communities has been to explore the impact that increasing, and changed, modes of interaction with the 'outside' world have had on communities. The interest in the existing, and potential, impacts of oil on rural communities was demonstrated by applications for funding to the Social Science Research Council which proposed researching aspects of the social impact of North Sea oil discoveries (Social Science Research Council, 1975). As a result, a Social Science Research Council advisory group was established, which worked in conjunction with Scottish Office assessors, in order to avoid an over-concentration of research on particular topics, whilst other

topics were potentially under explored. This led to the establishment of the North Sea Oil Panel which commissioned research resulting in a series of papers. At the preface to each of these publications, it is stated that ‘One of the research priorities established by the North Sea oil panel was to take a fundamental look at what is meant by “way of life”’. These papers were published in 1980, and comprise research findings conducted in various localities, exploring themes such as the impact on communities in the face of increasing interaction with ‘outside’ areas. For instance, Byron’s research explored ‘the changing relationship between Burra society and the processes of the bureaucratic institutions of the State’ (1980 p.13). He suggests that whilst the traditional social structure has been changed as a result of this relationship, and there has been an adoption of new symbols of identity, such as building better houses, changes have been appropriated with reference to local values (ibid, 1980). Mewett suggests that,

In Lewis esoteric culture has now largely disappeared as the local population have taken on the values of an urban-oriented mainstream culture...the devaluation of esoteric culture involves a comparison of the island with other parts of the wider society (1982b p.242).

However, Cohen (1987) notes that, within the face of change, crofting continues to retain importance as an articulation of social discourse and local values. He states,

people do not think of their modern behaviour as making them “less Whalsa”. But neither do they invoke customary practice in a traditionalistic manner. Rather, they adapt it to the new circumstances...Its symbolic potency is still such that people can read into it whatever messages may be relevant to themselves (1987 p.95).

‘Outsiders’ meanings of crofting

The *meaning* of crofting is not one which is articulated solely *within* crofting communities, or by crofters (Condry, 1980; Parman, 1990; Macdonald, 1997). It is one which is also defined by those outwith these communities. The meanings that ‘incomers’ attach to what they perceive to be a ‘way of life’ in crofting communities, are explored by Forsythe (1980) and Condry (1980). Forsythe (1980) conducted research into the experiences of urban migrants to an Orkney community and states,

incomers’ statements about their migration consistently express a dislike of cities, an assumption that urban and rural life are intrinsically different, and a belief that rural life offers a solution to dissatisfaction experienced in the urban setting (1980 p.27).

She continues,

These sets of opposing qualities are familiar ones. They express the perspective of the pastoral ideology... In presenting their move as a response to the inherent superiority of country life over city life, the incomers are consciously placing themselves within the Western pastoral tradition (Forsythe, 1980 p.29).

Similarly, Condry identifies the types of meanings that ‘outsiders’ attach to crofting and states,

every year the Crofters Commission in Inverness receives numerous requests from people who would like to find a croft and retreat to a rural idyll of their own imaginings... The incomers contrast their own enthusiasm for the crofting way of life, as they picture it, with the apparent lethargy of the islanders... To the islander, crofting rarely means self-sufficiency... This has nothing to do with cultural decay, as many incomers believe, but is rather an exercise in economic rationality (Condry, 1980 p.p. 61-62).

This statement reveals an inherent contrast between ‘incomers’, and ‘outsiders’, conceptions of crofting and those held by crofters themselves, a fact noted by Macdonald who states that, for outsiders, crofting and ‘way of life’ ‘Tend to be part of an attractive, ‘alternative’, ‘non-materialistic’, ‘pre-modern’ lifestyle’ (1997 p.124).

Summing up

Thus, crofting is entwined with value systems which place a positive value on those connotations associated with crofting, including an emphasis on tradition, family and community. It is one which is associated with not only positive values, but with a ‘unique culture’. As Condry notes,

The idea that the islanders have a separate culture differentiates them from many other areas of Britain (we would not talk of the culture of Partick, Stirling or Gala, for example). The idea that the islanders have a culture – a unified, distinctive way of life – is a politically important and effective notion (Condry, 1980 p.68).

This discourse is invoked by insiders and outsiders, and a discourse of crofting may be employed in inter and intra community, and regional, relations. It is a highly complex concept which

‘occupies a prominent place in Whalsay ideology. It has more salience as an idea than as an economic activity. Its continued salience must be treated as paradoxical in the context of contemporary economic life’ (1987, p.100).

Macdonald notes that meaning extends beyond working a croft, ‘while these men express a lack of interest in *crofting* – in working the croft – they may nevertheless still identify with the broader definition of *being a crofter*’ (1997 p.124).

Impact on this project

Previous anthropological research has had a major influence on the development of this project. By revealing the symbolic, and active role of crofting, it has highlighted the necessity of exploring what crofting *means* to people, in addition to exploring the nature of their physical participation in crofting. As Jackson states,

An account of the crofter's life may perhaps best be done in factual terms of how a crofter copes with earning his living and how he spends his time. As regards the way of life, the focus narrows to the pattern of a crofter's life and seeks to understand the meaning that his life has for him (1980 p.6).

The importance of crofting in women's lives cannot be understood by socio-economic historical analysis, it is equally necessary to explore crofting's role at a symbolic level. A further major influence has been to explore the ways in which the meanings that people attach to crofting have changed, or shifted, as a result of wider changes as outlined above. Byron's (1980) analysis has had an impact here, in exploring the role of a crofting community in relation to the state, but equally Renwanz (1981), Cohen (1987) and Macdonald (1997) have informed the ways in which I think about shifting meanings of crofting in the face of change.

One significant point of departure between my research and previous anthropological research is that I have chosen not to do a community study. This decision was prompted by personal, ethical and academic factors.

My personal relationship with this project is discussed below but, briefly, I was living in a crofting township in Shetland prior to conducting research. My original intention was to conduct a traditional community study in this township, with a

focus on women. However, very early into the research project I realised it would be difficult for me, on a personal level, to conduct a community study and felt that it would potentially have negative repercussions for the community. After about a year of living in the township, I became aware of very major divisions between local crofters. I felt that to conduct a community study, particularly with reference to some potentially sensitive ‘recent’ issues I wished to explore, such as croft amalgamation, would simply fuel existing hostilities. No matter how careful I would be in disguising place and personal names, as well as adopting a pseudonym for the township, I felt it would be all too easy for X to identify Y. Personally, also, I found living within this small community a fairly oppressive experience, in terms of a lack of anonymity, which I was not used to, and felt more comfortable conducting research outwith the confines of the community. To some extent, however, this project *can* be considered as a community study. I did participate in the community, attended ‘events’, participated in the local playgroup, and informally talked to locals about crofting. In addition, some of my interviewees were local women. However, I felt that there was no academic reason to limit this study *exclusively* to a community study. As Kockel notes, Irish ethnography has moved on considerably from the ‘traditional paradigm of community studies’ (1995 p.4) to encompass a broader spectrum of issues, and employing a much wider range of methods, exploring political and contextual questions and problems such as gender relations and economic development. I felt that semi-structured interviews (chapter 2) with women about crofting were the best means of meeting the research objectives. Whilst the participant observation fieldwork has added another dimension to these results, the interviews have

formed the primary method and have overcome the potential problems in conducting a community study.

Applied/ official research

In this section, I will review applied/ official research that has been conducted into crofting and the types of *meanings* that crofting has at the level of ‘official discourse’. The role of crofting in relation to the State, from the 1930s to the present day, has been researched comprehensively by Hunter (1991). In this project, the impact of policy developments is explored at the local level in Shetland. Here, I wish to offer a broad overview of the *kind* of research that has been conducted, the reasons for its undertaking and the types of discourse of crofting that are manifest in the resulting publications, many of which are official documents produced by the State.

The legal status of crofting

Prior to exploring the instigation for research that has been conducted into crofting, it is necessary to define crofting’s legal status, its relationship to particularly government bodies and its situation in relation to wider social and political factors.

‘A piece of land surrounded by regulations’ is a much used, and fairly accurate, definition of a croft. To explore the particular position that crofting occupies within political and legislative frameworks, it is necessary to go back to the Crofters Act of 1886. As stated above, this Act effectively transferred power away from landlords. It meant that crofters’ futures were, for the first time, more closely

entwined with the State, and represented a major departure from the older social/agricultural order. It represented a recognition that State intervention on behalf of crofters was necessary, and initiated a 'special relationship' between the Highlands and Islands and the State. Crofters are, to a great extent, tenants who rent their holdings from a landowner, but the landowner effectively has no say in how crofts are managed or in inheritance rights, and the rent a landowner can charge has to accord with State regulations. A comparatively small number of crofters are themselves 'landowners', or owner-occupiers of their own crofts, and they, like the larger landowner, are subject to crofter law and must abide by State regulations. In 1955 a Crofters Commission was established. This body has a wide range of power. Whilst a crofter may transfer a croft tenancy within the family without seeking the approval of the Crofters Commission, in those cases where the crofter wishes to 'assign'³ the croft to someone outwith the family, the choice of recipient has to be approved by the Commission. The Crofters Commission also has the ability to end a crofter's tenancy in the case of crofter absenteeism. As stated above, crofters also qualify for a unique set of grants which were implemented as a recognition of their 'special status'.

The Highland problem and crofting

The majority of applied research conducted with reference to crofting has been concerned with finding solutions to the 'Highland problem'. Crofting is, at various times, seen as part of the problem or a potential solution to the problem. The 'Highland problem' of depopulation, an inverted age structure in favour of older people, the lack of amenities, high levels of unemployment and a below average standard of living in comparison to the rest of Britain, is one which has

been confronted to varying degrees throughout the Highlands and Islands during the twentieth century. Attempting to seek solutions to these problems has been the primary instigation for the majority of applied research. The majority of this research has been commissioned by the government of the time, although independent research (e.g: Darling, 1945; Collier, 1953) has also been conducted. A broad shift, discussed in greater detail below, is evident in the ‘meanings’ the official bodies have attached to crofting during the twentieth century. The ‘meanings’ of crofting are, as Hunter (1991) demonstrates, clearly embedded within wider contemporary political and socio-economic conditions of the time. Hunter suggests that the documentation produced by the Scottish Office Department of Agriculture in the 1940s reveals a ‘sheer dislike...for a smallholding system so manifestly at odds with the highly productive, capital-intensive agricultural industry they were endeavouring to promote in post-war Scotland’ (1991 p.16), although some independent researchers such as Darling (1945) and Collier (1953) recognised the potential social value of crofting as an agricultural system that was *not* to be equated with farming. The State view of crofting was evident in the programme of croft amalgamation pursued by the Crofters Commission in the 1950s and 1960s which was designed to increase agricultural production in the Highlands and Islands and, by creating larger crofting units, make these into ‘viable economic units’ for, inevitably, a smaller number of crofters.

A shift in meaning is evident from the mid 1960s in the types of meanings officially attached to crofting. A Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) was established in 1965, with powers outwith the agricultural sphere,

which recognised the need to explore social, as opposed to solely agricultural, solutions to the Highland problem. The HIDB was responsible for providing capital designed to generate employment opportunities in the region, in both traditional and new industries, and had land acquisition rights. The HIDB perceived crofting as having a positive role at a social level, as is evident from this HIDB statement,

If one had to look now for a way of life which would keep that number of people in relatively intractable territory, it would be difficult to contrive a better system. But its future depends on other employment and support. This the Board accepts as a clear challenge and duty (1967 p.45).

More recent publications stress the positive role of crofting in relation to the Highlands and Island problem, as a means to maintain population levels and local culture. The Crofters Commission state

Crofting forms a central part of the historic, cultural, social and economic fabric of the Highlands and Islands...in general the Commission are confident that crofting can meet the challenges of the present and the future and continue to make a meaningful contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of the area and play its part in the protection of the environment (The Crofters Commission, 1991).

The Commission defines crofting as ‘the anchor of population in an area of great scenic beauty and high environmental quality, but with poor employment opportunities’ (The Crofters Commission, 1989 p.2). This discourse of crofting as an environmentally friendly form of agriculture is evident in the joint 1992 publication between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU), which explores the potential cultural and

environmental contribution that crofting has to make. This discourse is also evident in the bulk of recent Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (SERAD) publications (see chapter 5 for detailed discussion). At a general level, a broader focus on social and environmental issues is evident in recent rural policy and official documentation. SERAD has identified a need to adopt an integrated approach (SERAD, 2001a). In 1991, the Crofters Commission defined its objectives as the promotion of an environmentally sensitive agriculture and the development of agricultural and non-agricultural diversification on crofts (The Crofters Commission, 1991).

Impact on this project

This ‘applied’ body of research has influenced this project in several ways. Firstly, it has highlighted the positive role that crofting has to play in the maintenance and regeneration of rural communities. Secondly, it has shown how crofting’s development is closely entwined with, and dependent on, wider factors. This provides the framework to explore some of the issues in chapter 4, where crofting is explored in relation to shifting circumstances, discourses and influences. However, it receives fullest attention in chapter 6, where the impact of recent policy directives on the lives of women in Shetland is explored. SERAD have called for a greater ‘partnership’ in agriculture and a main theme explored is whether this ‘partnership’, is, in practice, more than empty rhetoric. The relationship between centralised policy makers and local consumers is explored. At this level, then, this project has an applied value in relation to very significant contemporary discussions in crofting.

1.2.1.2 Instigation for research into ‘the 1930s to the present day’

In this section, I will discuss the main reasons for conducting research into the period of the 1930s to the present day. These include: the desire to redress the balance of previous research concentration on earlier periods/ themes; the desire to study crofting as a system entwined with wider social/ political changes; the desire to conduct research with an applied value.

Over-concentration on particular themes/ episodes

As discussed above, especially with reference to ‘popular’ histories, within the field of historical crofting research there has been a concentration on the origins of crofting and/ or the Crofters Wars. An exploration of crofting ‘from the 1930s to the present day’ represents a move away from potentially ‘stereotypical’ analyses of crofting. Within popular historical discourses of crofting, ‘the past’ has tended to be conceived of as a ‘golden age’ of subsistence, pre-mechanised and inherently ‘untainted’ crofting, and in order to provide a realistic historical analysis of crofting, it is essential to give equal weight to its more recent past. Analysis of this period allows an exploration of the development of the more recent historical foundations of the crofting system that exists today.

Crofting: a system entwined with wider social, political and legislative circumstances

In popular imagery, in discussions of ‘peripherality’, ‘way of life’, and ‘unique crofting culture’, it is easy to get the impression that crofting exists as a closed, anachronistic system. In fact, analysis of this period shows that crofting’s development has been intrinsically entwined with wider social and political

developments. This was discussed above in relation to applied/official research. In terms of recent rural policy, for instance, crofting must be considered within a European context and in relation to recent CAP reforms (chapter 6). The focus of this project is designed to explore the impact that ‘outside’ influences (see Brody, 1973) have had on women in Shetland in crofting (Chapter 4), and the current and future role of crofting in ensuring community survival. Bradley and Lowe (1984) suggest that most successful attempts to integrate empirical rural research into mainstream debates have shifted attention away from community studies towards an interest in the rural implications of national social change. However, the eschewing of the community studies approach has had the negative effect of reducing the emphasis placed on the interpretation of local distinctiveness. This research project will attempt to avoid this problem by exploring the effects of social change and the implications of this at a localised level, in relation to the *agency* of local actors.

In addition to policy shifts and their impact on crofting, the 1930s to the present day is a period of profound communication and technological developments (chapter 4). It is a period which witnessed the ‘opening up’ of rural crofting localities. In the twentieth century people have been able to move in and out of rural areas in a way never conceived of before. They have been exposed to new ideas and lifestyles not only in the form of new people, but in the form of radio and television, and more recently the internet. This is not to suggest that, prior to 1930, those in rural locations were ‘shut off’ from ‘outside influences’, but to suggest that there has been a profound shift in the types of relationships that local rural communities have with those outside their immediate vicinity. Hunter states

that, from the early twentieth century,

in their overall outlook, as well as in their experiences of work and wages, the crofting population were no longer a people apart. The way they lived was not, of course, the way that their fellow citizens lived in Glasgow, Manchester or London, but the differences were clearly much less than they had been...The crofter of the 1930s smoked the same cigarettes, wore the same dungarees, read the same newspaper...as millions of people in the south. He listened, on his newly acquired wireless set, to the same BBC programmes. He went about his local business, very often, on a mass produced bicycle of the type also used by innumerable city clerks and factory workers (1991 p.30).

Thus, a central theme of this project is to explore how a sense of local identity, with specific reference to women and crofting, is maintained and/ or transformed in the face of increasing exposure to non-local values and practices. The impact of technology, particularly agricultural technology, on crofting is also a major theme.

Applied value

The final reason for conducting research into this period is the hope that it will have an applied value (see above), with the discussion of contemporary women's experiences in Shetland being contextualized in relation to the recent past and policy directives (chapter 6). By exploring how practices in, and meanings attached to, crofting have shifted since the 1930s, it is possible to provide a more meaningful insight into contemporary perceptions of crofting when compared to the shifting perceptions of crofting that are evident throughout the twentieth century. It is also possible to explore the impact that shifting patterns in crofting and other factors have had on women's lives since the 1930s.

1.2.1.3 *Instigation for research into women and crofting*

In this section, I wish to identify the main instigation for conducting research into *women* in crofting, as opposed to crofting more generally. The initial instigation was prompted for two main reasons. Firstly, it was felt that an exploration of their role, as pivotal within the crofting system, would provide an insight into the ways that crofting had developed and changed since the 1930s. Secondly, it recognised the need to redress the fact that women had been largely ignored in accounts of crofting and Highland and Island agriculture in general. A third reason for conducting research into women's lives is due to the applied stance of this project. It was hoped that, by exploring younger women's attitudes to crofting with specific reference to recent policies, that it would be possible to explore the types of roles they played at present, and potentially in the future. Fourthly, this project explores the role of crofting in *structuring women's identity*, in relation to local discourses of 'women's roles', as well as in relation to wider dominant discourses of women. Finally, crofting is explored as a system which is characterised by inherent inequalities and divisions, based on gender, which have been subsumed beneath a discourse of 'family crofting'.

Pivotal within the crofting system

Analysis of *women's* lives in crofting does not fall outside the 'mainstream' of crofting research, but, instead, provides the basis from which to gain a deeper understanding of crofting at a general level. This is due to the kinds of roles that women have historically played in crofting.

As discussed above, crofting originated as a form of part-time, subsistence agriculture, requiring supplementary income derived from men's participation in paid employment, originally predominantly in the fishing or kelp industries. The small size of land-holdings and often poor quality of land has meant that for the vast majority of crofters, crofting has continued to be a form of part-time agriculture, requiring supplementary male income (Collier, 1953; Hunter, 1976; Mewett, 1977; Crofters Commission, 1998). The nature of men's employment has, to a large extent, and especially in the earlier twentieth century, been dependent on sea related industries such as fishing, whaling and the Merchant Navy (Collier, 1953; Nicolson, 1978). Participation in whaling and the Merchant Navy, in particular, could require lengthy absences, potentially for up to years on end. As a result, women were predominantly responsible for working the crofts and providing a range of social functions, such as caring for elderly relatives and providing child care networks for other women (chapter 4). Collier defines the woman as 'the pivot' of the crofting system and suggests that 'without her active co-operation the system is doomed' (1953 p.58). I will offer here a brief overview of the kinds of sea-related employment that Shetland crofting men were involved in, in order to show women's essential contribution to crofting in one locality. The difference between crofting localities tends to be one of degree, and in many other crofting regions similar patterns of male absence are evident, given the need for supplementary income and the coastal location of crofting townships.

In Shetland, as outlined above, the development of crofting was entwined with the development of the *haaf* fishery, and men's compulsory participation in it. The *haaf* required the participation of men from May to September, which meant that,

from its inception, women were responsible for running crofts for much of the time either on their own, or without the assistance of young, adult males. With the *haaf* fishery, for instance, the ‘menfolk’ would attempt to be around for the heavier work, such as sowing, harvesting and cutting peat. Not all types of male employment, however, ‘fitted in’ with the crofting calendar in this way and, as stated, their participation in the Merchant Navy could mean that they were absent for far longer periods of time. Thus, whether it was on a daily or weekly basis, or for much longer periods of time, women were often primarily, or solely responsible for the crofts. This was enhanced by the marked sex ratio imbalance in Shetland which led to a high number of female headed households (Black, 1995). During the twentieth century, male employment patterns have started to shift, and such prolonged absences have become less common. However, many crofters continue to be involved in fishing and other sea related industries (see below), which have meant that men may be away for long periods of time. The rural location of many crofting townships has also, prior to improvements in communications, required the absence of men even when employed in ‘land-based’ jobs. For instance, in Shetland, post the World War II during a period of capital works, particularly road construction, many men would leave their crofts during the week, or for longer periods, to stay in Lerwick, or wherever the work was concentrated. The employment of crofters from other parts of the Highlands and Islands as itinerant navvies was also common (Hunter, 1991).

Women’s role in crofting extends beyond their agricultural participation and in order to explore crofting at a broader level, it is necessary to explore their role. As shown, crofting is imbued with connotations of ‘family’, ‘community’ and

‘tradition’, and women have played a central role in the creation and maintenance of social relations within crofting communities. As shown in this study, women tend to be the ones who are responsible for organising community ‘events’, for doing a variety of voluntary work and providing essential community services, whether paid or unpaid. An exploration of their role allows the opportunity to explore crofting’s social, as well as agricultural development.

In addition to their croft, domestic and community work, women have, like men, contributed financially to their families. Traditionally, this has been ‘in kind’ rather than in the form of hard cash. In Shetland, women contributed financially to their households by knitting, which provided the essential ‘everyday’ staples, as well as larger items, and which was essential to the household (Fryer, 1992).

Women knitted and ‘sold’ their knitting to the merchant shops, a system known as ‘barter-truck’ (see chapter 4). Knitting continued to provide an important source of household income, and reached a ‘boom’ in the 1960s and 1970s, when many women, as well as men, participated in the machine knitting era, which provided comparatively substantial incomes for many families for the first time. Since the 1960s, women have increasingly ‘gone out’ to work in all crofting areas. There is a predominant pattern of part time work, often concentrated in the ‘caring’ services provision sector, as home helps, care assistants etc. Thus an exploration of women’s lives during this period is one in which crofting is explored in relation to change, specifically with reference to shifting employment patterns of women.

Providing women with a voice

The second main reason for conducting research into crofting women’s lives was

to redress the fact that they have, to a large extent, been excluded from historical analyses of crofting. There is a moralistic, for want of a better word, instigation for recognising women's contribution and redressing the male bias inherent in previous research. Undoubtedly, there is at least an implicit influence from recent shifts in research paradigms and the influence of feminist researchers (chapter 2). Recent 'popular' books on crofting often contain a 'feature' on women (Thomson, 1984; Mitchell, 1986). Although this approach can be accused of marginalizing women from the main body of the text into a separate section, it is, perhaps, a commendable starting point that is required in order to acknowledge women's role in crofting. As such, it can be contrasted with some previous research into crofting. Cohen (1979; 1987), particularly, manages to almost wholly exclude women from his analysis. In *Whalsay: symbol, segment and boundary in a Shetland island Community*, all Cohen's 'scenes of life' portray male activities and all his photographs are of men. His descriptions of crofting activities as being central in 'being Whalsa' focus almost exclusively on male arenas and, in his whole book, only two pages are devoted to women's activities. Hunter (2000) recognises, himself, with reference to the *Making of the Crofting Community*, the lack of attention given to women and states, 'What other changes might I make to a wholly revised version of *The Making of the Crofting Community*? I would not, to begin with, make the mistake of implying – as I tended to do in 1976 – that the crofting population is almost exclusively male' (Hunter, 2000 p.24). That kind of recognition, along with the commissioning of this project as one of the first UHIMI research projects, suggests that in the future, women's role will be acknowledged to a far greater extent and incorporated into more general accounts of crofting.

Applied value

Women have not only been necessary to crofting 'in the past', but continue to play an important role. The idea that women are central to the 'crofting problem' is not a new one. Darling states,

crofting life compares unfavourably with urban conditions, especially for women. The crofter's wife has to take a hand in all the operations on the croft and over and above the cares of the house and family which she shares with her sister in the town she may have to carry water from the well, often some distance away, and to bring her household supplies along township roads which in winter may be not only inconvenient but actually dangerous. It is no great exaggeration to say that the key to the whole crofting problem lies in the hands of the women, especially the young women. If they elect to stay in the township, there is hope for the future. If they leave, they will probably never return' (1945 p.33).

In order to understand present day crofting and its potential future, it is important to explore the kinds of roles that women play at present, and perceive themselves as playing in the future. At a time when rural development policies are focussing on socially integrated approaches and are encouraging environmentally friendly forms of agriculture, women could, potentially, be central players in this sphere (chapter 5). Thus, to assess the future of crofting, it is necessary to explore the degree to which women feel their needs are being met and the types of roles they wish to play, against a backdrop of policy directive analysis.

Crofting: structuring women's identity

A review of feminist research (discussed in detail in chapter 2), combined with the influence of the review of anthropological research which showed the symbolic

role of crofting in structuring identity, shifted the emphasis of the original research question from exploring *crofting's* development due to women's participation, to exploring the role that crofting had in structuring women's identity.

Feminist researchers have demonstrated that 'gender' is a socially constructed category (Bonvillian, 1995; Coltrane, 1998). Males and females *learn* how to be men and women in ways which are culturally specific. What constitutes 'femininity' and 'masculinity' differs between societies, although cross cultural research has highlighted the similarities, at many levels, between 'women's roles' cross culturally, including the predominant association of women with child-rearing and the domestic sphere in most cultures. 'Crofting', as a practice in which women engage and a concept in which they define themselves in relation to, is analysed at the level of how it contributes to the social construction of women. Its role in this process of social construction is considered in relation to other structuring factors, such as women's roles as mothers, paid-employees and home-makers. The interplay between crofting and these other structuring factors is explored to see how concepts of 'femininity' and what constitute 'appropriate women's roles' are dependent upon local discourses. The significance of local discourses concerning women's roles, and with reference to crofting, in particular, is explored against a backdrop of communication developments and the exposure of women in Shetland to 'new', or non-local discourses concerning women. The ways in which these are appropriated, and transformed, with reference to local values and ideals is explored.

Feminist rural sociology: power distributions and the concept of rurality

The further area in which feminist research, or more broadly women's research, has had an influence on this project is specifically in relation to feminist rural sociology (chapter 3). The impact of this research in informing the research issues addressed in this project has been at two main levels. Firstly, a number of researchers have highlighted the inequality that exists in 'family farms' and which is subsumed beneath a common ideology of the 'family farm' (Ghorayshi, 1989). Cross cultural research of this kind also shows that women tend to assume 'secondary' roles, and describe themselves as 'helpers' to the man, who is the main farmer, and usually who is the one accorded the title 'farmer' (Rosenfield, 1985; Alston, 1990; Keating & Little, 1994). This type of analysis particularly informed the types of issues addressed in chapter 4, where gender divisions and inequalities within crofting are explored.

Rural women's social research has revealed a certain degree of 'conservatism', or traditionalism, with reference to rural women's identity (Stebbing, 1984; Whatmore, 1991b; Keating and Little, 1994). Stebbing (1984) suggests that within rural communities there is a strong discourse of women as being primarily homemakers, subordinate to a male breadwinner and adhering to 'traditional' women's roles. Thus, in the analysis of crofting on women's identity, the issue broadens slightly to an analysis of the concept of 'rurality' in structuring women's identities.

1.2.2 Personal instigation for research: aims and objectives

I was first made aware of this project after responding to an advert in the *Shetland Times*. At that time, the working title of the PhD was ‘The participation of women in crofting from the 1930s to the present day: perceptions on continuity and change’. At the time, I was living in Shetland and wanted, for logistical and methodological reasons, to focus on exploring crofting women’s lives in *Shetland*. Methodologically, I felt it was necessary to adopt a qualitative approach (discussed in chapter 2) and to focus on the ways in which women think about and articulate their lives in crofting. The choice of Shetland as a case study area was, ultimately, dependent on the fact that I was living there at the time and had no desire to leave. However, from a social scientific perspective I felt that my personal relationship to the subject matter would bring a depth of understanding to particular issues, particularly with reference to the ways in which the past and present interact, the ways in which we draw on particular aspects of our family’s pasts and the ways in which women from ‘different’ backgrounds relate to each other. One of the actual ‘aims’ therefore, of research, was to conduct a research project which allowed me to address issues of self-reflexivity and autobiography during the research process.

My ‘personal’ relationship with this project stems from the fact that my grandmother was born into a crofting family in Shetland in 1911. She hated both crofting and Shetland and, at the age of fourteen, left to go into service on the Scottish mainland. Of course, this move cannot be explained solely by a desire to leave Shetland. At that time there were few employment opportunities available for women in Shetland and her three sisters also went to live on the Scottish

mainland, though not at such a young age. My grandmother rarely returned to Shetland and worked hard to lose her Shetland dialect. She was embarrassed by the 'primitive' conditions in which she felt she and her siblings had been raised, which she compared to the better standard of living she enjoyed on the mainland, a feeling which, no doubt, was exacerbated by her husband's taunting of her for sharing a house with the cows. However, dislike it as much as she did, Shetland remained a dominant part of her life and, through her, my mother's. My grandmother knitted using the Shetland method, with a knitting belt. If things were lost then the 'trows'⁴ had taken them. She wholeheartedly believes that one of her neighbours, whom she refers to as 'The Bunch of Roses' was a witch. Above all, what emerges from her childhood memories is that she worshipped her mother. Whilst she talks of her father with admiration as an intelligent and knowledgeable man, she talks of her mother with love, as the lynch pin of the family, working hard to provide in the harshest of conditions.

My mother went to Shetland for two long visits as a child and remained fascinated by it. She had fairly romantic notions about Shetland, fuelled by the different lives her crofting relatives lived to hers, the ruggedness of the landscape and the harsh weather she encountered there. She returned as a grown woman with two children and a husband the year before I was born. The year after, when I was a couple of months old, she bought a cottage and every year the whole family, eventually comprising five children and a dog, would go on holiday to Shetland. However, Shetland was always present with us as more than a holiday destination. Like my mother, we grew up to take-for-granted the existence of 'the trows', who were conveniently blamed if anything was lost. We were taught that we were 'special'

for ‘being Shetland’, and, whilst it seems a bit clichéd, the warm reception we received from our many relatives always made Shetland seem like a second home.

For many years I had had an inkling to live in Shetland, which came to fruition after I had a baby. My sister was living there and, fairly impulsively, I decided to move to the house where we had spent our childhood holidays and where I had visited several times as an adult. At a rational level, it is difficult to analyse my main instigation for moving to Shetland at that time, with an eight week old baby, whom I was raising on my own. The attraction of a rent-free house was certainly a contributory factor. However, the choice of Shetland was not simply due to this fact, and, I feel, reflects my perceptions at the time of motherhood, and particularly single motherhood. Moving to Shetland with my tiny son seemed like the culmination of a journey during which, in my solitary pregnancy, I was never scared of impending single motherhood and frequently drew comfort from my female forebears who, I presumed, had often had to cope entirely on their own. This was suffused with romantic notions of living an idyllic rural lifestyle. A week after arriving in Shetland, I saw an advert for UHIMI PhD students. I decided that fate had intervened and applied to study women in crofting.

I have offered the above sketch of my personal relationship to the project not as a means to pay lip-service to the idea of autobiographical reflexivity, but to highlight some of the ideas that I had about Shetland women and crofting long before undertaking research in this area. Firstly, I was raised with the idea of a very strong female presence. I was always interested in my mother’s forebears and she told us a heroic tale of women managing on their own in the absence of men.

My grandmother talked of her father as highly intelligent, but it was her mother who was imbued with the qualities of strength and hard work who emerged as the central figure in her stories of her childhood. My mother, a person keen to reject formal 'feminism' at any level, told me how unfair it was that her uncle, as the son of the family, had inherited the family croft when it had been her aunt who had done the vast majority of croft work. Thus I, armed with my own feminist ideals, reacted favourably to this idea of strong women managing without men. I had a very clear idea of the kind of history that would emerge during this project and the types of stories that women would tell. Secondly, we were raised with a sense of Shetland pride. As children we all liked to tell people that our relations came from Shetland. I liked to link myself to my Viking heritage, something which was evident during my first degree in Archaeology. Our mother brought us up to think that we were special because we were 'from Shetland', and our Shetlandness was reiterated by the kindness of relations who distinguished us from non-Shetlanders when we were 'home' (in Shetland). Finally, I had strong ideas about the conservatism, or traditionalism, of women in Shetland and what I presumed to be their inherent skills in child rearing and home making.

Undoubtedly fuelled by insecurities about first time motherhood, I felt pressured, for the first time, to keep a clean house and hang out my washing properly.

The biases that I brought to research could, potentially, have resulted in a very one-sided picture of Shetland women's participation in crofting and have provided the type of popular, heroic history that characterises much of Shetland's local histories. I feel that because I was aware of my pre-formed opinions, which were only based on family myth and popular knowledge, it provided a starting point

from which to analyse particular issues. Thus I have explicitly explored the development of a heroic discourse and questioned the extent to which it represented women's actual experiences. I have analysed the feeling of Shetlandic pride that people have, and the implications this has for writing about history. I have explored the impact that my own perceptions of Shetland women as being fairly conservative in outlook have had on the interactions I have had with them. At the end of the day, my pre-research biases have not been constraining, but have provided the basis for viewing particular issues in particular ways. The fact that, at the end of this research project, I have quite a different view of Shetland crofting women than I did at its conception, suggests that this approach has been useful. My personal relationship with research has, therefore, inevitably shaped the types of questions I have addressed and the approach taken, especially with reference to discourse analysis (see chapter 2).

The degree to which my having 'Shetland roots' will influence the perception of Shetlanders of the history I have written is debatable. On the one hand, I hope it will be apparent that I have a great admiration for the people and the place, despite the fact that I chose not to live there permanently, a fact I attribute more to my personality and circumstances at the time than any inherent problem with Shetland or Shetlanders. On the other hand, I think they might be relieved that I don't view Shetland, or crofting, in an overly idealistic fashion. With regard to a particular 'type' of incomer, which might tend to include researchers, there is a tendency on the part of some Shetlanders to categorise them, to some degree, as hippy-environmentalist/ 'ethnic' types (as one cousin put it). My familiarity with family and places has undoubtedly influenced the extent to which I regard

Shetland as ‘normal’, in terms of the similarities of interests of people, as opposed to an overly romanticised wilderness (although it also holds some degree of attraction for me at that level), and I would anticipate that this view of life in Shetland might be well received. Perhaps my long standing relationship with the place and family connections will mean that I am perceived as being one step nearer those about whom I have written, but I would think I would be perceived very differently if I had been brought up in Shetland. If that had been the case, however, the resulting history would, inevitably, have been a different one.

1.3 Shetland: context and impact

In this section I wish to do two things. Firstly, I wish to provide the reader with a description of Shetland, in terms of landscape, climate, and geographical location. Secondly, I wish to broadly define the impact that conducting research *in Shetland* has had in shaping this research project (an impact which is apparent at a much more detailed level in the discussion chapters). Originally, I intended to cover these two issues in separate sections, but found that there was such a high degree of overlap that they would be more usefully combined into one section. It is impossible to describe ‘social developments’ without contextualizing them in relation to landscape, climate and Shetland’s geographical location. Similarly, in exploring the impact of ‘Shetland’ in shaping research issues addressed in this project, I found that I was referring to those factors which might, more traditionally, be discussed under the heading ‘setting’. For instance, ‘peripherality’, though employed in an ironic sense, is used to describe Shetland’s location in relation to the mainland of Britain, but it is also identified as a discourse which is entwined with a Shetland sense of identity, that has informed

the issues addressed in this project. For these reasons, aspects of setting, social history and the development of this project are discussed together.

1.3.1 A constellation of islands

Shetland comprises over a hundred islands, fifteen of which are inhabited today.

They stretch from Muckle Flugga in the north to the cliffs of Sumburgh Head in the south, a distance of over 100km, with the addition of Fair Isle, a further 39km to the south, ‘like a stepping stone on the way to Orkney’ (Ritchie, 1997 p.10).

The largest island is known as ‘mainland’. It is 55miles in length and twenty miles at its widest point. However, the island is so deeply invaded by the Atlantic that no part of Shetland is more than three miles from the sea.

Different islands have developed in different ways. For many of the more outlying islands, there has been a pattern of sustained depopulation, to the extent that some have become completely depopulated. This is not true of all islands however. For instance, Whalsay has maintained a high level of population and has witnessed less emigration than other parts of Shetland due to a strong local economy based on fishing (Cohen, 1987). The presence or absence of a buoyant local economy is a major factor in maintaining island levels and Thomson (1983) notes that Burra, another island community with a strong fishing industry, retained higher population levels than Fetlar, although the latter was characterised by much more fertile land and was known as ‘the garden of Shetland’. Improvements in communications and the connecting of some islands, including Trondra and Burra by bridge to the mainland, have assisted in halting the tide of depopulation from

some communities, as well as transforming the nature of social relations within Shetland.

The fieldwork for this project has been conducted on the ‘mainland’ of Shetland (Figure 5, appendix 3). The main reason for this was to maintain a clear focus on the primary research issue: to study women in crofting. As demonstrated above, I wish to move away from a community study approach and, whilst the role of crofting in social discourse is explored, it is contextualized in relation to other issues, such as gender relations and wider social and political developments. I felt that to conduct research in the more outlying islands would have shifted the focus to an exploration of how individual islands had developed in the twentieth century, issues which have received attention in Shetland from Byron (1980) and Cohen (1987). With reference to issues such as the impact of improved communications on Shetland women, I wish to explore the broader impact of these developments, as opposed to exploring, for instance, the precise developments that occurred in individual localities. Whilst not conducting fieldwork in the islands, however, the findings of research are not exclusively relevant to the mainland of Shetland. With reference to the primary issues explored, the findings of this project are applicable, with room for regional variants, to areas outwith the mainland. It should also be noted that within the mainland of Shetland, there are regional economic variants that have inevitably had impacts on women’s lives, and their participation in crofting. However, as a result of interviewing women throughout the mainland of Shetland, a high degree of homogeneity is evident in their accounts with reference to the ‘practice’ of



Figure 5: Geographical distribution of interviewees (amended from SIC, 2001)

crofting, and contrasts between women's perceptions of their lives in relation to crofting tend to be based on age, and not locality. The 'snowball' sampling

technique inevitably resulted in a slight geographical bias towards the west of Shetland.

1.3.2 A peripheral location?

The majority of publications in Shetland start by describing its geographical location in relation to the rest of Britain, and then comparing the proximity of Shetland to Greenland and/ or Scandinavian countries (e.g: Nicolson, 1978; Fenton, 1997; Ritchie, 1997). Shetland is, simultaneously, represented as being peripheral, to the mainland of Britain, and central, in relation to other northern European countries. Shetland, the furthest north of the British Isles, is as far north as Cape Farewell in Greenland, and Helsinki in Finland. Lerwick is 340km from Aberdeen, and a similar distance to Bergen in Norway (Figure 6).

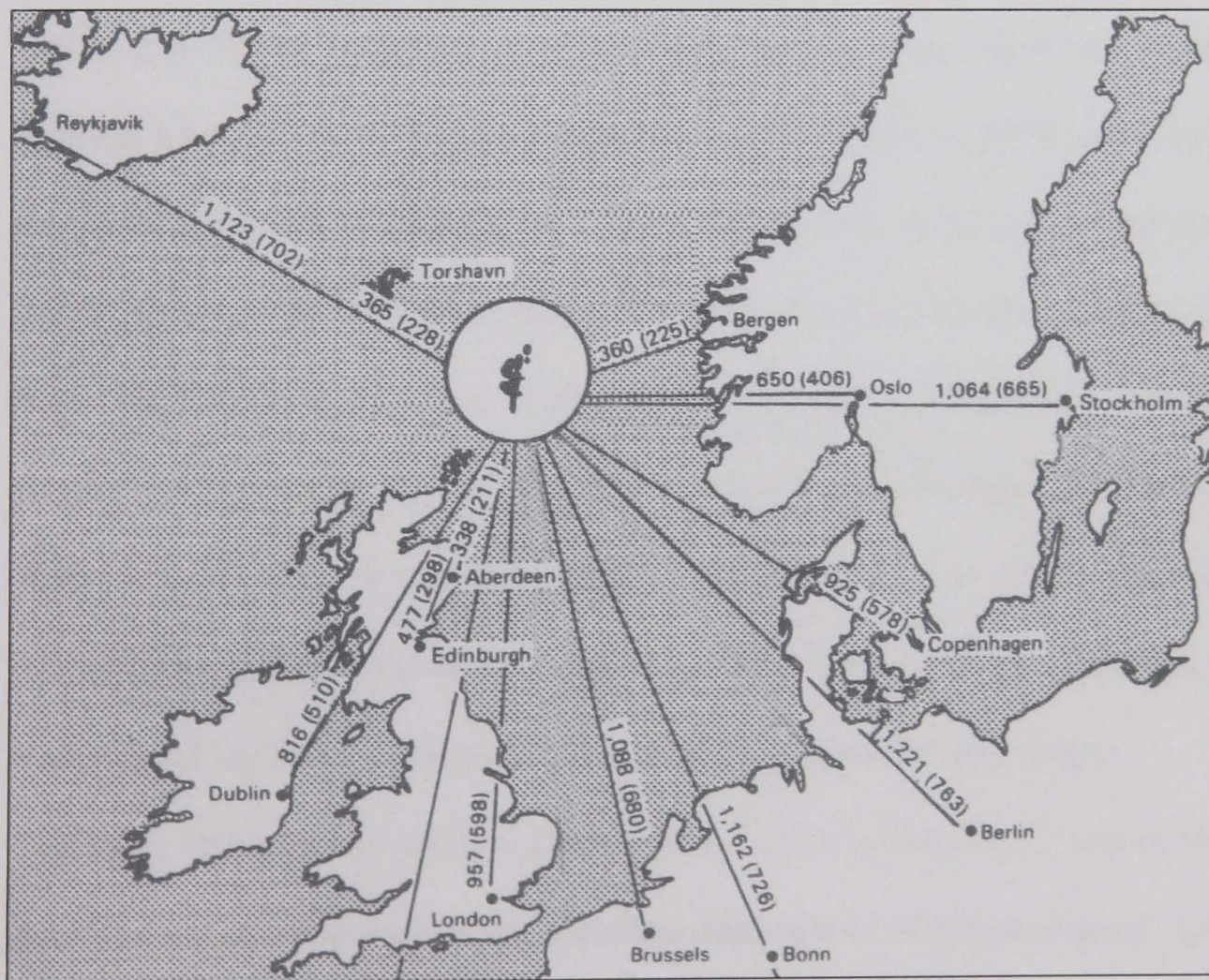


Figure 6: Location map of Shetland in relation to other European countries (amended from SIC, 2001)

Shetland's location as both 'peripheral' and 'central' has been a primary factor in its social development through time. Shetland attracted Viking settlers, as well as being a stepping stone for Viking colonisation towards north and west Britain, the Faroe Islands and Iceland (Fenton, 1997). From the fifteenth century onwards, Shetland's position meant that she was well placed for extensive trading links with Germany and the Low Countries and, from the eighteenth century the centres of trade began to shift towards Leith, London, Hamburg and Spain. Shetland's links with Norway have been particularly close and for 500 years, from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, Shetland and Orkney were ruled by Norway, with the islands being pledged to Scotland in the fifteenth century. Fenton (1997) notes that Norse economic influence continued up to the nineteenth century, but, primarily at a symbolic level, 'Norse influence' has continued up to the present day. The persistent identification of contemporary Shetlanders with their Norse heritage has had a major influence on this project. As Fenton (1997) notes, even during the period of Norse rule, well before the fifteenth century, Scotland played a significant role in Shetland's economy, and the period of Scottish rule has, itself, been over 500 years. Yet Shetlanders consider themselves as 'separate' from the rest of Scotland, and stress their Norse roots as primarily distinguishing them from the Scots. This idea of 'separateness', and the moves that Shetland has taken to establish a degree of autonomy within the British Isles, actively employs a discourse of 'crofting', and particularly crofting women as being 'hardy', 'capable', 'independent' beings of Norse stock. Thus, in chapter 5, I explore the development of a popularised and idealised discourse of Shetland women 'of the past', which I show is a recent construction and one which is 'used', as part of a selectively reworked and remembered past, in contemporary discourses of

Shetland ‘nationalism’. This theme of ‘the past in the present’ is also explored in chapter 6.

1.3.3 The sea

As noted above, no part of Shetland is more than three miles from the sea, and the sea has played a primary role in Shetland’s development. The Shetland crofter is commonly described as a ‘fisherman with a farm’, in contrast to the Orcadian who is defined as ‘a farmer with a boat’. As shown above, the origins of crofting in Shetland were tied in with the enforced participation of male crofters in the *haaf* fishing. Unlike some other crofting areas, however, Shetland had a long history of fishing. The history of fishing in Shetland has received considerable attention elsewhere (e.g: Goodlad, 1983) and here I wish only to give a broad overview of some of the main trends in the Shetland fishing, and other sea-related, industries, since the 1930s, and show how this pattern of male employment has influenced Shetland crofting, and has influenced the issues explored in this project.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were characterised by a fishing industry that differed markedly in Shetland from that which developed from the early twentieth century onwards. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Shetland fishing was dominated by the *haaf* fishery. This was confined to the summer months, from May – August. The *haaf* fishermen had a mid week and weekend break on land, but as these were spent in the ‘lodges’ established at the fishing stations, which were often miles away from the crofter’s home, the women were generally responsible for running crofts during the summer months on their own. The *haaf* fishery, however, did allow men to be at home for the ‘heavier’ work,

during the *Voar* (spring/ sowing) and *Hairst* (autumn/ harvesting), which was also when peat was cut. Similarly, the herring industry, which took off in Shetland from the 1870s, and which eventually superseded the *haaf* fitted in perfectly with the crofting calendar, requiring as it did the absence of men from May – September. The haddock fishery, which developed along side the herring industry from the 1880s, provided potential employment during the winter for some crofters. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were, thus, characterised by fishing industries which, to some extent, fitted in with crofting. They were also characterised by the participation of ‘ordinary’ crofters. The herring industry, for example, was one which operated from ports on the west side of Shetland, such as Scalloway, Walls and Papa Stour, and, from July onwards, from Lerwick. The herring industry provided employment for women who were responsible for gutting and packing herring into barrels for transportation. In its earlier phase, many women worked at the local ports throughout Shetland. As the processing industry became more focussed on Lerwick, large numbers of women flocked there, staying in ‘huts’ and working in teams of three. They were joined by herring gutters from other parts of Scotland who, like the Shetland women, followed the herring fleet as it moved southwards in the earlier twentieth century from Lerwick, Wick, Peterhead, Lowestoft and Yarmouth. The herring industry reached a peak in 1905, but suffered badly during the World War I, when markets in Germany and Russia for salted herring disappeared and it never fully recovered, although it was very productive in the 1920s and 1930s.

From the early twentieth century, a major shift occurred in the focus of Shetland’s fishing industry. The steam drifters that had appeared at Lowestoft and Yarmouth

and the East coast of Scotland came to dominate the herring industry. Whilst it had previously been possible for crofter-fishermen to invest in second hand sailing boats, the steamers required far greater substantial capital investment. Due to this, the only Shetlanders who could invest in the industry were those who made fishing a full time occupation. In the early twentieth century, in several parts of Shetland, communities of full-time fishermen were becoming established, especially in Lerwick, Scalloway and the islands of Whalsay, Skerries and Burra. In Burra, the development of Hamnavoe was purely as a fishing village, marking the complete separation of the crofting and fishing industries (Nicolson, 1978).

The increasing specialisation of the fishing industry and the demise of the herring industry, meant that many crofters had to seek alternative means of employment. Again, these were linked with the sea in the form of Whaling and the Merchant Navy. The Arctic Whaling effectively came to an end before the World War I, but throughout the twentieth century, and particularly from the 1920s, Shetland men have participated in the Antarctic Whaling, which made a particularly significant contribution to Shetland's economy from c.1945-1960 (Angus Johnson, pers. comm). Participation in the Merchant Navy, which provided an important source of employment for Shetland men up to about the 1970s (Angus Johnson, pers. comm.) demanded absences of months, or even years on end. For the majority of people in Shetland, it was less easy to combine seafaring and crofting than it had been in the past. This led to a situation in which women were spending increasing amounts of time working the crofts without men.

The fishing industry was revitalised in the 1960s, with the rebuilding of the fleet and new processing plants being established, which meant that most of the island's catch of haddock and whiting could be filleted and frozen locally before shipment, leading to subsidiary employment and work for women. Fishing has remained an important, though locally concentrated, industry in Shetland. The development of the salmon fish farming industry, from the 1970s onwards has provided an important source of employment, including women's employment, at processing levels. Today, fish farming in Shetland is continuing to develop, with diversification into halibut, cod and scallop farming. Fishing continues to provide a major source of income in the Shetland economy, and Shetland fishermen participate in different fisheries, including the whitefish, which is dominated by Whalsay fishermen, and inshore shellfish fishing industries. Shetland's well developed fish processing section, which relies on exploitation of demersal and pelagic fishers, has resulted in nineteen fish factories (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 1999). Shetland's lower unemployment rate of 2.9%, in 2000, comparable to 4.8% for Scotland generally and 6.9% in the Western Isles, is attributed by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to the dependency on the fisheries sector and the resultant demand for labour during the winter months (HIE, 1999). Seafaring continues to be an important employer in several other spheres, such as activity connected with the oil terminal at Sullom Voe which employs tug men, inter-island ferries and ferries going south from Shetland, and the employment of Shetland men in sea related industries on the Scottish mainland.

1.3.4 Landscape, climate, topography and the development of crofting in Shetland

Not only is the development of crofting in Shetland entwined with the participation of Shetlanders in sea related industries, but it is also entwined with the climatic, topographical and landscape qualities of Shetland.

As Nicolson notes ‘Shetland’s climate is much maligned for rainy days and strong winds’ (1972 p.15). The average wind speed is high, with gales occurring on an average of 58 days a year, with some of the highest wind speeds ever recorded in Britain having been measured in Unst. The wind has, of course, had a major impact on the landscape and flora of the isles. The covering of heather is short and stunted due to the high winds. Trees are rare, although they are becoming more common today due to people’s participation in Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes (chapter 6), however there is only one major concentration of trees at Kergord. Ritchie notes that the strong winds, since about 3000BC have ensured the steady erosion of the land by the sea, carving out rock arches and stacks, narrow geos along faults in the bedrock and ghoups, or caves. Although there are also plenty of sheltered harbours and fertile lands – enough to ensure both early colonisation by farming communities and later invasion by Viking and Scottish land-seekers (Ritchie 1997).

Agriculturally, Shetland is characterised by poor crofts, unproductive land (with the exception of some areas), a harsh climate and peripherality from the main British markets. Earlier in the twentieth century, Shetland crofting provided a range of subsistence produce, including crops such as potatoes, kail, turnip, corn and a variety of animals were kept, including sheep, cattle, hens, ducks, geese

and, less commonly, pigs. This pattern is evident up to post the World War II, during which, and after, massive changes occurred in Shetland crofting. These are discussed in detail in chapter 4 but, put simply, during the World War II there was a production driven effort which was sustained and enhanced after the war by the provision of livestock subsidies from 1940 onwards. In Shetland, the result of this, along with other factors such as the harsh environment and shifts in paid employment patterns, has resulted in a dramatic shift to sheep production (Figure 7, appendix 4)⁵. This shift is generally evident throughout the crofting region as a whole, but is more marked in some areas than others. In Shetland, today, few crofters keep a cow or hens and, with the exception of hay and more predominantly silage, typically the only crop grown, in a very limited capacity, is potatoes. Shetland agriculture is also characterised by croft amalgamation. In some cases, an individual crofter may hold up to about ten crofts or, more rarely but not unheard of, up to about twenty crofts, which effectively operate as large sheep farms. In the township where I stayed, out of over twenty crofters, the majority of crofts were concentrated in the hands of three individuals, with one crofter holding six crofts and the other two crofters holding eight or nine crofts each. At the time of conducting research, this process of croft amalgamation in the hands of these families was still continuing (chapter 6).

In chapter 6, I discuss CAP reform, particularly with reference to livestock subsidies and the change from a 'headage' to 'area' payment. This, along with ESA and Rural Development Regulation (RDR) schemes will, inevitably, have a considerable effect on crofting. With reference to the crofting situation in Shetland, it raises the issue of how crofters who, I would suggest, have in the later

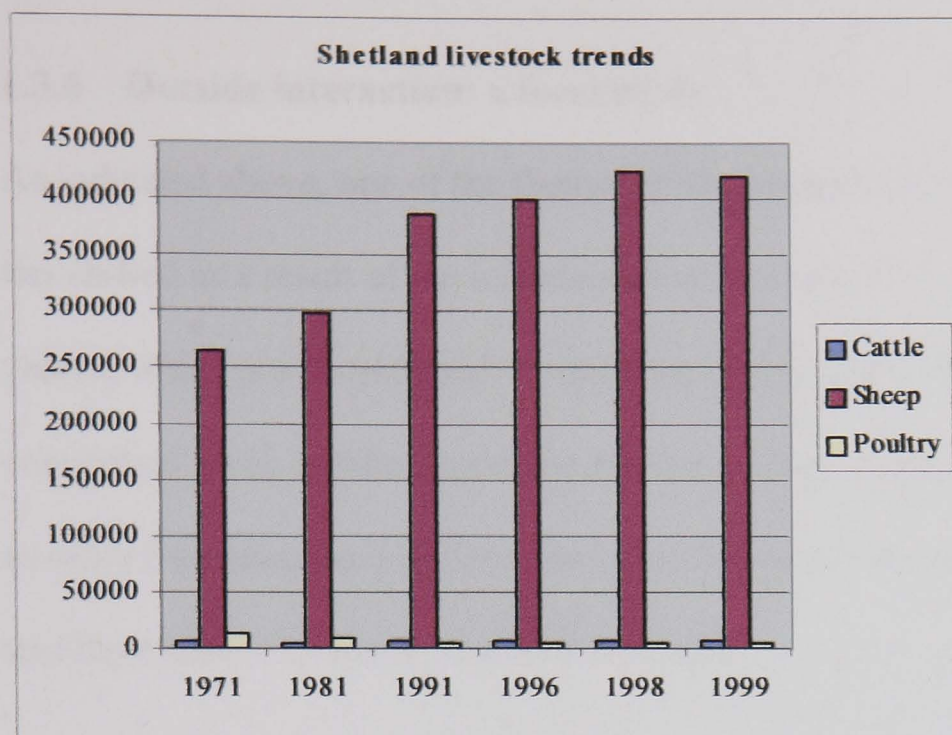


Figure 7: Shetland livestock trends between 1971-1999 (statistics from SIC, 2001)

twentieth century adhered to a production driven discourse, react to changes which seriously challenge this basis.

1.3.5 Key sectors of the Shetland economy

In addition to a well developed fishers sector, the combined output of which amounted to £139m in 1999, oil production in 1999 amounted to £53.7 and agriculture to £11.8m, knitwear to £4.9, tourism to £14.4 and the Shetland Islands Council (SIC) to £112.7 (SIC, 2001). The majority of people in Shetland are employed in the service sector, including hotels, restaurants, education, health and public administration (SIC, 2001). Shetland's lower unemployment rates contribute to an age distribution which is contrastable to the HIE area as a whole, which is characterised by a progressively ageing population. In 1998 in Shetland, 63.6% of the population was under 44 years, compared to 58.1% in the HIE area. Shetland is also characterised by a recent pattern of in-migration, and a population growth of 1.6% between 1991-1996 (HIE, 1999).

1.3.6 Outside interaction: a local study

As indicated above, one of the themes of this project is to explore how ‘crofting’ has shifted as a result of the introduction of new ways of doing things, ideals and values, which are ‘introduced’ through various mechanisms. At a broad conceptual level, similar processes may be evident in other crofting areas, as well as other European rural regions. But it is the precise nature of these interactions that have helped to shape Shetland crofting.

Black (1995) explores the socio-economic ‘shocks’ of the two world wars and the coming of oil on Shetland, and suggests that, in addition to focussing on these ‘big’ issues, it would be useful to explore the other ‘outside’ influences that have had a continual influence on Shetland in the twentieth century. Thus, I explore crofting in relation to ‘outside’ influences at the level that they particularly affected Shetland, and this will inevitably differ from other parts of the crofting region. Shetland’s economy is characterised by booms and depressions. For instance, during and after the World War II, there was an economic boom which was artificially maintained by a series of public works, and which was followed by high unemployment. A further boom, characterised by a resurgence in the traditional industries of knitting, fishing and agriculture, was experienced in the 1960s, and the significance of oil in transforming social relations and the local economy in the 1970s, cannot be overstated.

‘Outside’ influences are also explored in relation to recent policy directives and the suitability of ‘centralised’ policies in relation to local circumstances. This issue is explored particularly with reference to environmentalism and

diversification and the findings of this project in relation to these issues may well contrast with research conducted in other crofting regions.

1.4 Guide to the thesis and ‘making sense’ of the whole

Following this introduction, chapter 2 details the methodological approach taken, which focuses on qualitative methodology, feminist methodology and discourse analysis. Chapter 3 is a literature review of research into women and farming, and contextualises this project in relation to this wider body of research. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 represent an exploration of the main research themes. Chapter 4 explores the shifting meanings that crofting has for women since the 1930s, to explore the shifting role that it has in structuring their identity. It also explores the shifting role that they have played in crofting and the changes that have occurred due to technological and social developments. It challenges the notion of an egalitarian society, and shows that crofting has always been based on fairly strict gender differences and inequalities. Chapter 5 explores the development of a ‘local hero’ discourses of crofting women ‘of the past’ and explores the impact that this has on the ways in which we interpret crofting, both past and present. It also shows the impact that a dominant local discourse, whether highly mythologized or not, can have on the ways in which contemporary women view themselves in relation to crofting. Chapter 6 explores recent developments in crofting and suggests potential future directions that crofting may take. It draws on ‘official’ documentation and policy directives and explores the degree of congruence between centralised and local women’s discourses.

Together, these chapters allow an exploration of the complexity of crofting in women's lives. They show that crofting operates at many levels, that, at this time, it is in a state of flux, and yet that it continues to be important to women and looks set to be so for the foreseeable future.

1. Kelp is a sea weed derivative which was used in the production of glass and other commodities and was in considerable demand during the eighteenth century.
2. Sheep fanks are a set of folds for sheep situated on the common township ground which is the focus for communal activities, such as dipping and shearing flocks
3. Under crofting law, a crofter 'assigns' his or her croft to someone who, if not a member of the crofter's family, has to meet the approval of the Crofters Commission. Money often changes hands during assignments, and this money is referred to as 'compensation'.
4. 'Trow' was the Shetland word for 'trolls' (Nicolson, 1978), and there are an abundance of stories surrounding these magical 'little folk'
5. Since 1971, there has been a dramatic change in land-use which has witnessed a drop in the amount of land under cultivation and a huge increase in the amount of sheep in Shetland. The area under grass (excluding rough grazings) has risen from 6,998 hectares in 1971 to 18,898 hectares in 1998 (SIC, 1999). All other crops (including barley, oats, turnips, swedes, kale, cabbage and potatoes) have seen a dramatic decreased in the amount of land use devoted to them, from 1337 hectares in 1971, to 314 hectares in 1998 (SIC, 1999). There has been a massive decrease in the amount of poultry kept, from 12,950 in 1971 to 4,276 in 1998, whilst the amount of sheep in the same period has increased from 264,779 to 424,312 (SIC, 1999). A comparison of figures from 1986 and 1998 reveals the increasing role that subsidy provision has played in comparison to market value in recent years. In 1986 the production value of all agricultural produce in Shetland totalled £6.02m, and totalled £5.36m in 1998 (and this must be measured against a rise in inflation and production costs during the same period, meaning a greater discrepancy between the prices). Looking at the same two years, the total assistance from SOAFED and EU (including HLCA, Annual Premium Schemes and ESA payments) has risen from £8.24m to £12.12m (SIC, 1999).

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

As defined in chapter 1, the central research issues to be addressed in this project were:

1. To explore the shifting role of crofting in structuring the identity of women in Shetland from the 1930s to the present day.
2. To explore the development of a dominant local discourse of ‘Shetland crofting women’ and the implications this has as a reinterpretation of ‘the past’ and for women currently crofting in Shetland.
3. To explore the significance of crofting to younger women at the present day, and to explore their potential future roles in crofting.

The research methodology was designed to ensure a close ‘fit’ with the subject matter, and to explore the above issues to their full potential. It developed as new issues and questions arose and was not an ‘arbitrary’ or wholly pre-determined choice. Each of the research issues required a particular approach and its exploration depended on, at times, quite different research methods and sources. For instance, the exploration of women’s perceptions of crofting employed semi-structured interviews as the primary research method, although documentary analysis and participant observation represented secondary methods. The exploration of a local dominant discourse of ‘Shetland crofting women of the past’ utilised both women’s interview material and documentary analysis, primarily of ‘popular’ literature. The exploration of recent trends in crofting focused once again, primarily, on interviews, but also required analysis of

‘official’ documentation.

Although differences in approach were required with reference to particular issues, the overall methodology was designed to explore subjectivities and perceptions, to encompass my role as researcher, and to explore alternative experiences and perceptions of crofting. It was also designed to explore the role of ‘myth’ in society, and the role of the ‘past’ in the ‘present’. The methodology was informed primarily by ‘qualitative’ research issues (e.g: Strauss & Corbin, 1990), ‘feminist’ research issues (e.g: Roberts, 1981) and discourse analysis (e.g: Wood & Kroger, 2000). In order to explore women’s experiences of crofting, I felt that an ‘in-depth’ approach was required that allowed women to express how they perceived themselves in relation to crofting, as well as providing a detailed description of croft work, and other areas of their lives. Qualitative research has the capacity to explore the complexity of social life as based on subjectivities and experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Moris & Copestake, 1993; Flick, 1998). A literature review into feminist research issues revealed a substantial body of research on interviewing women (e.g: DeVault, 1990; Anderson & Jack, 1991). It also revealed the ‘political’ (Stanley & Wise, 1983; Smith, D. E., 1987) and ethical considerations (e.g: Oakely, 1981; Finch, 1984) of conducting feminist research. This review has informed the methodological approach adopted.

2.2 A qualitative approach

In this section I wish to address why a qualitative approach was adopted with reference to research issues and the availability of sources. To explore women’s role in crofting it was important to gain a detailed picture of their ‘everyday

participation' in crofting. To understand the significance of crofting in their lives, it was equally important to explore their *perceptions* of crofting, and how they perceived crofting in relation to other areas of their lives.

2.2.1 Circularity of analytical process and grounded theory

Qualitative research is commonly distinguished from quantitative research on the basis of analytical process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Moris & Copestake, 1993; May, 1994; Morse, 1994; Swanson and Chapman, 1994; Silverman, 1997; Flick, 1998). Flick defines this process as one of 'circularity' (1998 p.43), as opposed to the linear process of theory development, hypothesis testing and analysis that characterises quantitative research. In qualitative research, the sharp distinctions between different elements of the research process, such as fieldwork, analysis and theory development do not exist. Instead, there is a reciprocal relationship with different aspects of research developing as the result of interaction with each other (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Stake, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach is *inductive*, where important patterns and themes emerge from the data, as opposed *deductive* (Morse, 1994; Janesick, 1998). The inherent capacity of qualitative research to adapt to novel situations, and the fact that theory development is related to empirical data, provide it with the capacity to explore the complex realities of lived experience.

This approach has been developed most clearly in the *grounded theory* approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is defined as

one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents...it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 p.23).

Theory is elaborated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and discovered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Swanson & Chapman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as a result of exploring the complexity of lived experience and applying a constant comparative method which involves generating theory and checking this to data continually (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whilst an inherent feature of this research is, therefore, that it is 'led' by the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Miller, 1997; Flick, 1998), Strauss & Corbin state that researchers should be 'theoretically sensitized' (1998 p.167) and previous experience and theoretical knowledge will be brought into the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Flick, 1998). As Flick (1998) notes, the researcher's questions will be formed with reference to prior theoretical knowledge, but suggests a suspension, as far as possible, of this knowledge, in order to maintain an open mind and allow the *development* of theory.

The concepts of analytical circularity and grounded theory, and the need to maintain an open, reflexive approach were incorporated into the methodology as an integral element. The primary aim was to ensure a close 'fit' between the research issues, data acquisition and data analysis. The concept of circularity has emphasized the importance of writing, and reflecting, throughout research and maintaining a reflexive field diary. A re-reading of my field diary from the two years I spent in Shetland revealed that some of the issues that were particularly

important to me at certain times were formed in relation to my personal experiences at those times. Entries in my diary from early 2000 reveal that I was particularly aware, at a personal level, of the voluntary community work carried out by women and of the value to the local community of this type of work. This partly reflected the fact that, having lived in a crofting township for over a year, I was personally participating in this sphere, for instance in my capacity as secretary of the playgroup.

Grounded theory influenced the selection of the interview sample and the way in which interviews were conducted. 'Snowball' sampling is related to the concept of 'emergent design' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994 p.45) and allows the strategic choice of participants. They may be very different from previous participants, or allow particular, emergent, factors to be explored in greater depth. Sample selection is thus an on-going process as theoretical insights are developed. In this project, a core sample of women, from a variety of crofting backgrounds, was selected. The initial sample comprised six women, who were previously known to me. It included relatives, and women from the township where I lived. The sample 'snowballed' as I asked these women, and subsequent interviewees, to introduce me to other women they knew. When I asked for further introductions, I described the type of women that I might want to speak to in relation to the progression of research, and as significant issues began to emerge which were selected for further analysis. Criteria might include the fact that I wanted to speak to a non-Shetland woman or that I wanted to speak to a woman over the age of eighty. In all cases where I was given names of potential interviewees, I asked if the person making the introduction could contact the potential interviewee on my behalf. I did this

for several reasons. Firstly, I was far more comfortable that someone would contact someone else already known to them than I would have been about contacting 'cold' a complete stranger. Secondly, I felt that if women really did not wish to be interviewed, it would be easier for them to tell someone whom they knew, rather than feel pressurized, out of politeness, to say 'yes' to directly to my face. Conversely, I thought it would be much less likely that people would refuse to be interviewed if they were contacted by someone they knew, and especially someone who had been interviewed by me already. As no contacts refused to be interviewed, the strategy appears to have been successful.

In order to try and overcome inherent problems which may impede frank and open discussion, such as politeness and unfamiliarity (Oakley, 1981) I conducted repeated interviews with a number of women. I considered repeated interviews to be necessary only on some occasions, which depended on how the first interview progressed and on what stage I was at in the project. The requirement for repeat interviews depended very much on the interviewee's personality, and whether they were reticent about talking about themselves or not. I had a list of topics that I wished to discuss, which were fairly 'open', with my hope being that, whilst the interview would be linked to 'crofting', women would be free to talk about other aspects of their lives, such as their employment, children, holiday experiences and school days. I would always initiate the interview by asking women to tell me about their childhood experiences, whether or not they had grown up on a croft, and their memories of their parents and other family members. I would then ask them to talk about their lives as younger women (or their current lifestyles, in the case of younger women) and try to get them to detail the kind of croft work they

had done, or currently did, and to describe the kind of work done by men and women. I asked them about community work they participated in, as well as their participation in paid employment. For those who were married, I asked about their husband's employment and participation in croft work, and I asked those with children to tell me about how they combined child rearing with croft work and how they perceived their responsibilities as mothers. I also asked for their views on the current state of crofting, and what future directions they envisaged for crofting, especially with regard to current political developments. This 'open' approach appeared to suit most interviewees, who needed little prompting to talk about those subjects. On some occasions, however, interviewees were uncomfortable about talking about themselves, and repeated interviews were necessary. One woman, Mary, was particularly uncomfortable with the interview situation and offered extremely brief answers to my questions, which required a considerable amount of input on my part to try and explore issues in greater depth. In this particular case, a few hours after the interview was finished, Mary telephoned to say that she had remembered other things I might be interested in, and spoke for well over half an hour. This, as well as doing a repeated interview, overcame the problems of the first interview I conducted with her. Interviews which were conducted at an earlier stage in research tended to require repeated interviews, as the types of questions I wanted to ask developed. The interviews were mainly conducted over the course of a year, during the second year of research, and during this period the direction of the project developed considerably. After I had left Shetland, a final trip was made in the final year of research in order to revisit particular interviewees with a view to clarifying or pursuing particular issues. I conducted interviews in the interviewee's own home,

partly to try and make them feel as comfortable with the experience as possible, and also taking into consideration the needs of the older interviewees, as well as trying to impose as little as possible on people in terms of time, petrol etc. The interviews ranged from about an hour and a half to about 5 hours, and the hospitality I was shown was quite amazing. On several occasions women had specially baked for me coming, and on one I was given lunch. Only in one case did I conduct an interview at my house and that was because the woman, very considerately, did not want me coming out with my baby on what was a horrendous day!

With three exceptions, interviews were recorded by tape recorder. In two of these exceptions, the women in question were very uncomfortable with the idea of being taped. One of the refusals was from a woman with whom I had regular contact, and her refusal posed little problem. A further refusal to be taped was from two elderly women in their nineties who simply stated that they did not like the idea of a tape recorder being used. The final interviewee would have been quite happy to have been taped, but, due to time pressures, the interview was conducted at her work. We decided that a tape recorder would look a bit obvious if her boss turned up, whereas, without it, I could pose as a customer. With the exception of the two elderly women, the interviewees commented on the notes I had produced, including quotes that they had given, and were happy with them.

2.2.2 Complexity and subjectivities: contextualization versus statistical variables

Qualitative research was developed as a reaction to the inability of purely

quantitative analysis to sufficiently explore the complexity of social experience (e.g: Blumer, 1969). In order to explore this complexity, it is necessary to contextualize the different elements of human experience in relation to each other. This notion of contextualization necessitates a holistic approach and the ‘unriddling’ of various elements in relation to each other (Alasuutari, 1995 p.16). Instead of *breaking down* complexity into variables, complexity is increased by introducing context and relationality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Flick, 1998).

The development of qualitative research must be situated within the development of theoretical approaches, such as phenomenology and post-structuralism, that stress the variability of human experience and the multiplicity of ‘truths’ based on prior experience and understanding of the world (Flick, 1998; Hammersley, 1989). Whilst qualitative research does not share a unifying theoretical perspective, a common feature of theoretical stances is that they explore the role of subjective experience and the multiplicity of perspectives (Flick, 1998).

Incorporating a multiple perspective outlook has had a major influence on the research methodology for this project. The central method employed was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were designed to be as ‘open’ as possible, to avoid the possibility of relying on primary responses and maintain my contribution to a minimum. In this way it was hoped that my input would not act as a constraint on interviewees’ responses and deny the production of *their* viewpoint. Sample selection and repeated interviews were designed to reflect variability between respondents and build a picture of complexity based upon differing world views. One of the major research issues was to explore differences of experiences in, and perceptions of,crofting between women of

different ages. An attempt was made to derive an equal distribution in terms of age (Figure 8, appendix 3). Another was to explore the multiplicity of experiences between 'younger' women who are crofting today, and who may come from very different social and geographical backgrounds to each other. 'Younger' women are defined as those under the age of 65 at the time of interviews. The definition of 'younger' is, to some extent 'arbitrary', as Hillebrand and Blom (1993, p.179), note in their study of 'young' Dutch women, in which they define 'young' as being under 45. A distinction between younger and older women, in the context of this research, was felt to be useful as age was revealed as the most important factor in influencing women's perceptions of crofting. The age 65 was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the majority of women over the age of 65 no longer participated in crofting, particularly the physical aspects of crofting. Secondly, women over the age of 65, in general, had very different employment patterns and had not worked 'outside the home' to the same extent as those under 65. Finally, many women over 65 had assigned their croft to a younger relative, or were highly dependent on the work of a younger relative, and no longer actively managed the croft. The distinction does not represent a hard and fast categorisation, however, especially with regard to women who were either slightly under, or slightly over, 65. Crofting in Shetland is carried out by women who have been born and brought up in Shetland, women who have moved to Shetland from elsewhere, but from agricultural backgrounds, and those who have no agricultural experience. It comprises women who participate to a high degree in most aspects of croft work, and those who do very little in terms of agricultural work. A conscious decision was made to interview women from different



Figure 8: Age distribution of interviewees (statistics from SIC, 2001)

agricultural, social and geographical backgrounds in order to reflect this diversity.

In this way it is possible to explore the impact that ‘background’ may have on women’s perceptions of crofting. The only ‘over-riding’ criteria was that the woman had to either be presently living on a croft, or that she had lived on a croft at some point. This is not to suggest that there is necessarily a major division, in terms of lifestyle and contribution to rural localities, between ‘crofting’ women and other Shetland women. However, it does reflect the desire to explore ‘crofting’ in terms of activity and development, and in terms of the impact that it has on women’s lives, as opposed to an exploration of rural women’s lives more generally (although the resulting discussion is often applicable to non-crofting women).

A central issue was the way in which women’s attitudes to crofting have shifted as their other ‘roles’, for instance in connection to paid employment and the family, have changed. These issues could not be explored independently or reduced to variables: instead, the *interplay* and *relationships* between crofting and other aspects of the women’s lives is central to analysis. This project explored the detail

of daily activities, and subjectivities, that constitute crofting women's lives in order to gain an in depth understanding of the various structuring facets that operate in conjunction with each other. Whilst interviews focussed on crofting, they were 'open' enough to allow women to talk about a variety of topics that concern them and were designed to be interviewee-led as far as possible.

This concept of relating and contextualizing experience has influenced the diverse set of methods utilised in this project. In addition to semi-structured interviewing, documentary analysis was conducted (discussed in detail below). The diversity of methods and source utilisation was designed to explore human action on a number of different spheres, and to relate these spheres to each other. It did not represent a simple attempt to 'triangulate', or check, data, but to provide additional data and contextualize data in relation to each other. It did, however, also operate as a method of triangulation which served to enhance and verify, or question, previous findings.

The desire to contextualize experience has influenced the decision to conduct a case study. This project explored the lives of crofting women in Shetland, 34 of whom were interviewed (Appendix 3). It is also based on my experience of living within a Shetland crofting community. An alternative approach would have been to adopt a quantitative approach and interview a larger number of women, perhaps from different crofting areas, through a survey or questionnaire method. However, generalisability does not equal desirability. Stake suggests we should 'take that case from which we feel we can learn the most...Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness' (1998 p.101).

The complex, detailed and reciprocal relationship of women and crofting could not be explored at the type of superficial level proposed by a wide ranging study. The resulting picture would be superficial and general in nature. It would fail to challenge existing stereotypes about crofting and women or to gain a new level of understanding. However, whilst this project has not been selected on the basis of its generalisability or representativeness, it is hoped that it will be 'instrumental' (Stake, 1998 p.89) and provide relevant information on several issues, including women in other crofting areas, women and work and the development of rural areas in the twentieth century.

2.2.3 The role of the researcher

Qualitative research requires a reassessment of the role of the researcher. In contrast to traditional positivist positions, the researcher cannot be accepted as an objective, scientific instrument (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Flick, 1998). Carter & Delamont state

All researchers carry with them their emotional baggage...which is an accumulation of their social and cultural inheritance. This past at times conflicts with their plan to cultivate 'dispassion' and 'neutrality' in the field, and influences what questions they ask and to some extent the replies they receive (1996 p.xi).

Social research entails interaction between social actors: both subjects and researcher bring to this interaction a set of assumptions, biases and understandings of the world based on factors such as age, gender, religion and social class (Alasuutari, 1995; Edelman, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). 'There is no attempt to pretend that research is value free' (Janesick, 1998 p.41). Because research is a two way process, a denial of the researcher's own biases would fail to

acknowledge the fact that respondents will, inevitably, shape their responses to some extent, dependent on the way they perceive the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In addition, Carter & Delamont note that respondents may want, or even demand, responses from the researcher which ‘invalidate’ the traditional ‘objective’ research relationship (1996 p.xiii). However, as Edelman (1996) notes, the researcher may ‘play down’ or ‘disguise’ aspects of their social self in the field to facilitate the research process and ease relations. I certainly did this during interviews and, I would suggest, it is impossible not to. Simply by deciding what to wear for the interview the researcher is making a choice as to the image she wishes to portray, and the potential reactions this could elicit. During interviews, I inevitably presented myself to interviewees in a way that I felt would facilitate the interview and put the interviewee at ease. One way in which I did this was by taking my son, Duncan, aged between one to two years at the time of fieldwork, to a number of interviews. This gave the interviews a feeling of informality and perhaps helped women to relate to me as a mother, as opposed to a ‘career woman’, whose experience they may have perceived to be further removed from their own. Duncan was a prop, if you like, and in some ways no different from wearing a particular blouse. Inevitably, I have had to face both ethical considerations¹ and confront my own feminist values, regarding the ways that I might perceive other women, and the ways in which they might perceive me with reference to dominant female stereotypes. In terms of a ‘prop’, however, the difference between Duncan and a blouse is one of difference rather than kind, but it is enough to force one to clearly think about the impact of one’s social portrayal in terms of the research process. It has also been pointed out to me that, had I made a conscious decision *not* to take Duncan to interviews, when circumstances

meant that it would be easier to have him accompany me, I would equally have been presenting a contrived self.

In contrast to positivist traditions which contend that there is a reality out there which can be studied and understood, qualitative research is based on an alternative set of ontological assumptions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Denzin & Lincoln state 'There is no single interpretive truth...there are multiple interpretive communities, each having its own criteria for evaluating an interpretation' (1998 p.30). Thus the researcher's interpretation is *one* interpretation and not the discovery of an indisputable 'reality'. This interpretation will have been influenced by several factors and may differ from other plausible interpretations. It cannot be considered, or presented as 'the truth', but as her interpretation of the situation. The interactive nature of the research process may leave the researcher profoundly affected by the experience of analysis and contact with respondents (Griffiths, 1995; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Carter & Delamont, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Foltz & Griffin state 'It is clear to us that, as researchers participating in feminist rituals, we created the women we became' (1996 p.325). Reflexivity is thus essential throughout research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) in order to explore the different understandings that may be instrumental at different stages and the ways in which knowledge is being developed during the research process (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In contrast to presenting 'unproblematic' data, the researcher can explore and present the research *process* that has resulted in the final analysis and presentation. In this way the plausibility of the researcher's interpretations and the conditions which have influenced it are offered for scrutiny.

A reconsideration of the researcher's role has had a major influence on the design of this research project. In previous research, I had, to some extent, paid 'lip service' to the notion of the researcher's interpretation and the accommodation of a multiplicity of world views. In this project, I have a close personal relationship with the subject matter (chapter 1). By incorporating aspects of my own experiences in the written thesis, I will attempt to explore the impact that my own experiences, knowledge and understandings have had on research and to allow the reader to assess the potential significance of this.

2.2.4 Presentation

The issues discussed above do not only concern research methodology, but also research presentation. A qualitative stance means that traditional means of presentation must be questioned, and alternatives explored. These alternatives acknowledge the processual form of research, the possibility of various and competing 'truths', and the role of the researcher and researched in a two way, interactive relationship that is embedded in social relations (Standing, 1998). Social researchers have become increasingly aware of the cultural significance of spoken and written accounts, texts and the nature of 'discourse' in the production and reproduction of social forms (Atkinson, 1990). Denzin & Lincoln define writing as

a method of inquiry that moves through successive stages of self-reflection...from the field experience...to the research text that is the public presentation of the ethnographic and narrative experience (1998 p.21)

Above, it was suggested that the researcher's interpretation did not represent a singular 'truth'. This has major implications for presentation, in exploring how the

researcher's interpretation was derived and the factors that influenced it. Reed-Danahay (1997) notes that researchers are increasingly explicit in exploring, and writing about, the links between their own autobiographies and research. Foltz & Griffin state that 'writing ethnography is cultural construction, not cultural reporting...Since all knowledge is socially constructed, the researcher, as the instrument of data collection and interpretation, plays a central role in creating this knowledge' (1996 p.302). They advocate beginning with researcher experiences as people in a particular situation (see Stanley & Wise, 1983). From this perspective, Tillman-Healy (1996) writes a personalized account of living with bulimia that centres on experience and, by using the present tense and then focusing on her own written work, she moves away from the traditional scientific/sociological explorations of bulimia. Both her account and Ellis' (1996) account of caring for her ill mother, whilst highly personalized, manage to address wider issues from a personal perspective in a highly readable and emotive manner.

Personal narrative...by inserting into the ethnographic text the authority of the personal experience out of which the ethnography is made...thus recuperates at least a few shreds of what was exorcised in the conversion from the face-to-face field encounter to objectified science (Pratt, 1986 p.33).

The use of first person narrative in favour of traditional third person narrative in scientific reports potentially humanizes the account and enhances subjective experience (Clifford, 1986; Alasuutari, 1995). A further way in which matters of objectification and the accommodation of alternative viewpoints may be presented, is by presenting aspects of the research *process* (e.g: Denzin, 1997). Writing itself is an essential part of the research process and is an 'analytical tool'

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 p.240) at a reflexive and productive level.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) note that researchers should be aware of potential audiences for completed texts and that research has a social function, for instance in challenging the status quo (1995 p.20). The qualitative researcher has a responsibility to those people she studies. Her research, and subsequent presentation, may have an impact on those people being researched. With reference to feminist research, but applicable more generally, Standing states

one of our roles is to translate between the private world...and the public world of academia, politics and policy. The dilemma remains of how we do this without reinforcing the stereotypes and cultural constructions we are challenging (1998 p.193).

One area in which this is influential is in the presentation of informants' quotations and what should be 'done', or left undone, to these quotations. In analytical terms, it may be important to do as little to the quotations as possible. DeVault (1990) advocates leaving in the imperfections in order to explore the difficulties women may have in articulating experience and to show how they have 'worked through' potentially problematic issues. The use of dialect and colloquialism also has potentially conflicting agendas. On the one hand, the researcher's presentation of dialect challenges the, still prevalent, connotations that dialect may have with 'ignorance'. It respects the words of respondents and acknowledges dialect as a vital part of their culture. On the other hand, spoken language may appear very naive to the scientific text surrounding it (Alasuutari, 1995; Standing, 1998), and this may be especially true of dialect, thus reiterating prevailing stereotypes. Standing (1998) notes that her respondents *wished* to have their text 'tidied up' up, in order to present what they considered to be a more

suitable image. The wishes of respondent may, therefore, contrast with the objectives of the researcher and must be considered in presentation.

Especially with regard to feminist issues and dialect concerns, presentation was a central concern. Whilst some degree of 'tidying up' was conducted, data was, as far as possible, presented in the way that interviewees related it. A number of interviewees asked how 'how I wished them to speak' with reference to the Shetland dialect. I suggested that they talked as they would in everyday conversation, provided they were comfortable with that. I feel that the majority spoke to me as they would an 'unken soothmoothen'², as opposed to the way they would communicate with other Shetlanders, or with someone they knew better. Interviewees were asked to comment on transcriptions to explore how well they feel they have been represented and if they feel that their words have, in any way, been devalued or misrepresented. In those cases where women did comment on transcriptions, they were all content with the ways in which they had been represented in terms of dialect use and other matters. Not all women who were interviewed wished to see transcripts, and response, in terms of interest and comments, varied considerably. Some women appeared to be quite embarrassed by the process, whilst one, 'Patti', was both shocked and amused at the way in which she talked about her husband and his role in the family and croft. Initially, I asked women whether they would be happy for me to archive tapes and transcripts of our conversations with national and/or the local Shetland archive. I found that this approach made women feel rather wary, and decided, instead, to contact them at a later date. This will necessitate a follow-up visit to Shetland. Of the few women I did ask, two did not wish tapes and transcripts to be deposited in

the Shetland archives, and one of these women did not wish the material to be archived nationally either. The reasons they gave were that they were concerned that they might be identifiable, despite my assurances that, in the case of transcripts, personal names etc. would be changed. Their desire for anonymity was highly understandable as many of the interviewees made negative comments about other people in the community.

2.3 Feminist research issues

The methodology has also been informed by feminist research issues. Two primary considerations arose from the topic chosen. The first question to be addressed was, why women? The second was how best to explore women's lives. The first question can be answered with direct reference to the subject matter. Women (see chapter 1) had played a central role in crofting in Shetland and, at present, the discourse of 'Shetland crofting women of the past' is celebrated as a central facet of Shetland's heritage. The next issue was *how* to study these women's lives. A literature review into feminist research methods was designed to address this issue, and raised several political and ethical issues which also influenced the methodology adopted.

2.3.1 Exclusion, marginalization and sectionalization of women in research

A primary objective of the 'second wave' of feminism, from the 1960s onwards, was to enable women to 'speak for themselves' and to redress the fact that women had been excluded from social and historical research (e.g: Rowbotham, 1973). In many cases where women's lives have been explored, they have tended to be marginalized and sectionalized in terms of 'women's' subject areas, such as the

family and kinship (Connell, 1994; Purvis, 1994).

The reasons for women's exclusion and marginalization reflects the exclusion of women from the academy until recently and the fact that 'Drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles of men and women alike' Belenky et al. (1986 p.5). It reflects general social values that have produced research that is constrained within a dominant male ideology (Morgan, 1981). Those concepts that are deemed interesting, worthy and worth recording and analysing are those which relate to men and the male sphere (DeVault, 1990). Hekman (1994) suggests that because underlying historical and sociological concepts have been formed from a male point of view, this has become the 'real' view and woman is defined by the fact that she is not male. Subsequently, because women's history is, by definition, not male, it has been considered subsidiary, inferior and of less consequence.

The implications of women's exclusion and marginalization extend beyond the field of academia. Power resides in deciding what stories will be told and, unless challenged, this power will continue to reside with men (Heilbrun, 1988).

Heilbrun states that 'Lines can be cancelled and washed out' (1988 p.19) with the intention of maintaining the existing power structure that denies women an active contribution in the creation of history. As a result, women's contribution to society has been narrowly defined and they are presented as subsidiary in comparison to men. Until feminist research challenged this 'taken for granted' situation, further research was constrained within existing frameworks, resulting

in a perpetuation and acceptance of the existing social order. 'Hiding women' has inevitably resulted in a very partial picture in social and historical research. A whole set of resources have been ignored and entire tracts of social and economic life have received scant, if any, attention, because they relate primarily to women. Traditional research has, therefore, been inherently limited in scope and impeded by the fact that women have not been incorporated into general research programmes.

This research project is informed by the need to redress the male bias in crofting research, to acknowledge women's contribution and to avoid concentrating exclusively on stereotypical 'women's concerns', such as the family and motherhood. Providing women with a voice is not only seen as a necessary measure to acknowledge and record their contribution, but is also necessary to provide a meaningful analysis of crofting. The potential sectionalization of women in terms of subject matter is rendered meaningless as the participation of women in crofting demands analysis of their work, family and community roles. To concentrate on any one of these aspects would result in a very partial picture.

Feminist researchers are in general agreement as to the need to redress the situation and to conduct research into aspects of women's lives. There is debate about the best way to do this, including whether women should be researched in isolation from men or in conjunction with men. Stanley & Wise (1983) suggest that we should not just study women: feminist research should be concentrated on men. They suggest that it is only by studying women in relation to men that the structuring of gender relations can be analysed (ibid, 983). The alternative is to

concentrate on what falls loosely within a ‘women’s culture’ approach, to focus research on women, to analyse sources that pertain to them and conduct research into aspects that specifically concern women’s lives (e.g: Eisenstein, 1984; Strong-Boag & Fellman, 1986; Leydesdorff, 1989). This approach can be criticised on the basis that, by analysing women within ‘separate spheres’, it potentially ignores how men and women are structured *in relation* to one another (Kabayashi et al. 1994). In terms of the ‘women’s culture’ versus ‘gender relations’ debate, this research is informed by both views. Research will primarily concentrate on women and formal interviews will only be conducted with women. In this way the realities of being a crofting woman will be explored at an in-depth level that explores subjectivities and the minutiae of lived experience. Many of the research objectives can only be explored through discussions with women and relate specifically to how they perceive *themselves*. However, questions relating to *gender relations* were addressed during interviews and informal discussions with crofting men were conducted. There was no attempt to analyse women in exclusion from men, instead the aim was to explore the richness and variety of women’s experience as lived in a variety of different spheres.

2.3.2 Deconstruction and reconceptualization of ‘men’ and ‘women’

A shift occurred in the 1980s from analysing women’s oppression and subordination in gender roles to exploring the ways in which gender and gender relations are socially constructed (Connell, 1987; Kabayashi et al., 1994; Skeggs, 1995). Accepted values of gender as being biologically determined were challenged and the growth of post-structuralism shifted analysis towards deconstruction of the term gender and the ways in which gender is constructed

(e.g: Riley, 1988; Scott, 1988). Deconstructionist approaches are based on the view that males and females are born but men and women are the products of enculturation (e.g: Bonvillian, 1995; Coltrane, 1998). Males and females *learn* how to become men and women according to the social ‘norms’ which inform the ways they act and interpret the world. The nature of these assumptions pervades all aspects of life, concerning such mundane aspects as why women stereotypically cook turkey and men carve (noted by Coltrane, 1998). This challenge is necessary because gender is constructed in particular ways which have an impact on the lives that women live and is related to the unequal or disproportionate control over resources (Bonvillian, 1995; Evans, 1997; Coltrane, 1998).

Deconstructionist approaches have had a major impact on this study and, in turn, this study will add to the body of evidence that challenges deep rooted assumptions about what constitutes ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, and ‘men’ and ‘women’. The deconstructionist approach has provided a framework in which to analyse the factors that are responsible for creating women in terms of culturally accepted notions of what it is to be a woman. Adopting a deconstructionist approach provided the basis to analyse the ways in which, in relation to wider social changes, women were constructed *as women*. It is suited to analysing a long time period as the constructing factors can be traced through time. It is also suited to questioning the mundane and routine aspects of people’s lives that are fundamental in maintaining existing gender structures.

Chapter 3 shows how research into women and farming reflects shifts in feminist

research paradigms more generally, from an initial drive to make farming women ‘visible’ (Sachs, 1983) to a more recent focus on the complexity of gender relations as based upon reciprocity and co-operation (Bennett, 2001). The substantial body of existing feminist research and its demonstrable relevance to, and interplay with, general issues has resulted in a refinement in the types of issues addressed and a move away from potentially confining frameworks, as evident in some earlier research, which, nevertheless, fulfilled a vital role and created the bed rock for subsequent research.

2.3.3 Geographical case studies

Helly & Reverby state,

Before all women’s historians disappear into the land of gender, binary oppositions and representations, we need to remain ever mindful of the necessity of grounding our analysis in the material realities of class, race, sexuality, social structure and politics (1992 p.16).

A recent trend in research is towards ‘focused case studies’ (Kabayashi et al., 1994; Angerman et al., 1989) and this research is informed by the need to analyse women’s lives with regard to the local cultural conditions they live in. The research does not take place within one community, but is limited to ‘Shetland’, as opposed to being generalised to other crofting areas. Research is thus not reduced to the level of theoretical abstraction, but is firmly related to the realm of lived experience. Questions of gender identity are explored in relation to local identity and, specifically, a local conception of, and participation in, crofting.

2.3.4 Methods suited to women

Because traditional research has been primarily about and for men, its methods

have developed in ways that are suited to explore men's lives (Roberts, 1981; Belenky et al., 1986; Nielson, 1990; Gluck & Patai, 1991) or, at least, to fail to sensitively acknowledge the differences between women and men. DeVault suggests that the routine procedures of sociology constrain us within methodologies that 'distort women's experiences' (1990 p. 96; see Smith, D. E., 1987; 1989). It has resulted in a set of tools that do not have the capacity to produce the fullest research possible into women's lives. Several feminist researchers had addressed this issue in an attempt to 'empower' women by providing them with a more active role in research (e.g: Roberts, 1981; Nielsen, 1990).

The primary research method in this project is semi-structured interviewing. This reflects the fact that the period explored in this research project, the 1930s to the present day, provides the opportunity to speak to living women and that the type of information required has not previously been collated. There are few written records containing relevant detail with regards to women's perceptions of crofting or a detailed description of the work they did, although documentary analysis forms a secondary research method (see below).

The choice to conduct oral history represents more than a mere reaction to the fact that, given the time period in question, it represents a possibility. Oral history has a number of advantages over documentary analysis. Firstly, it provides access to the kinds of stories which have rarely been recorded. With the exception of sources such as diaries, autobiographies

and letters, which are written from a ‘personal’ point of view, documentary analysis can pose problems when attempting to explore people’s ‘everyday’ lives, and their concerns and opinions. The problem is exacerbated when exploring the lives of working class people, as the diaries etc. that are left for historical analysis tend to be written by members of the upper classes – people with adequate levels of literacy and leisure time. Analysis of documentary sources alone would fail to allow a detailed exploration of women’s everyday experiences of crofting, and of the values and meanings they attach to crofting. Oral history provides the capacity to analyse the everyday, the seemingly insignificant, and the aspects of people’s lives that have traditionally been deemed unworthy for recording (although the twentieth century has witnessed an ethnographic tradition which has emphasised the importance of the everyday and provides a substantial body of research for current and future historians). Secondly, oral history provides the opportunity to study ‘tradition’ (Vansina, 1985) as, particularly in ‘traditional’ societies, genealogical details, myths and performance related traditions have been handed down from generation to generation through the medium of oral story-telling. The type of memorised constructs that characterise oral traditions can be distinguished to some extent from the ‘life history’, or personal reminiscences of an individual, but when viewed at the level of discourse analysis both types of stories are revealing not only in terms of a narrative history, but as a window on how individuals and cultures view themselves, and wish to represent themselves. The choice of researchers to use oral history as a primary research method is often driven by the desire to

explore the 'subjective element' (Fraser, 1981; Munck & Rolston, 1987; Summerfield, 1998) and to explore the ways in which people's stories are constructed within frameworks of past and present, private and personal and memory and culture (Tonkin, 1992; Summerfield, 1998). It is at this level, as opposed to merely creating a narrative history, that this thesis views oral history. Oral history may be particularly suited to exploring the lives of women who have traditionally been under-represented in written sources.

The way in which interviews were conducted and analysed has been informed by feminist objectives. Especially important is an awareness that the structure and use of language itself fails to encompass women's experience, which may not 'fit' with clearly defined traditional categories (e.g: DeVault, 1990; Spender, 1985; Smith, 1989; Minister, 1991). Given this incongruity, in addition to the fact that women's speech has traditionally been devalued (Minister, 1991), women may face difficulty in articulating their experiences (DeVault, 1990; Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Several feminist researchers have suggested employing alternative methods in order to attempt to redress this problem (e.g: Oakley, 1981; DeVault, 1987; Gluck & Patai, 1991). Anderson & Jack suggest shifting focus from information gathering to analysing the dynamic process of the 'unfolding of the subject's viewpoint' (1991 p. 23). DeVault (1990) suggests a dismantling of traditional sociological categories in favour of a concentration on women's everyday experiences. Sensitivity on behalf of the interviewer provides the basis to adopt techniques to assist women to

‘work through’ issues that fail to comply with traditional ‘objective’ methodological requirements (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Being sensitive to problems of articulation was especially important for this research project. Given the wide remit of issues to be explored, it was envisaged that women would have problems articulating their experience in terms of ‘traditional’ categories. With regard to ‘work’, for instance, there would be a potential overlap between various categories, such as craft work, paid work and voluntary work. An initial pilot interview and informal discussions with crofting women confirmed the types of problems that women had in articulating their experiences. For instance, some younger women maintain they do ‘no’ craft work, or make no contribution to crofting, but, when asked to detail their routine experiences, it emerges that they do far more than they initially express.

Acknowledging the overlap between different areas of women’s lives, such as work and ‘responsibility’, and encouraging women to discuss these areas in terms of values and action has resulted in a richer body of data than if their responses had been constrained within clearly defined categories.

A further aspect which influenced the method adopted was the way in which women talk to each other in the course of ‘natural’ conversation. Finch (1984) suggests that women can easily elicit material from other women. From this standpoint, Minister advocates ‘the kind of interviewing that women intuitively would like to use when talking with women’ (1991 p.28). Whilst researchers should be wary of overstating the concept of ‘sisterhood’ (e.g: Oakley, 1981), I felt it was important to maintain as informal an approach as possible. During a

pilot interview the interviewee's perception of the interview as 'event' hindered this approach, although I felt that repeated interviews would serve to overcome this problem. Divisive factors such as age, class and race all undermine the commonality of being a woman and researchers should be wary of claiming empathy with women on the basis of gender alone (Chandler, 1990; Borland, 1991; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Olson & Shopes, 1991; Sangster, 1994). During some interviews, I was especially aware of age as a divisive factor that undermined shared empathy on the basis of being women. This probably reflected the fact that I had very little contact with older people, and, what contact I did have was generally in the context of being a 'child' in the company of my mother whilst visiting elderly relatives. Initially, I felt quite uncomfortable about speaking to the older interviewees, especially if they were physically frail, and I was very concerned about whether they were becoming bored, tired or had a dry mouth. I have no doubt that this adversely affected initial interviews, but as time went on I became far more confident in talking to older people.

The concept of 'empowerment' (e.g: Anderson & Jack, 1991) of women subjects has influenced the design, conduction and transcription of interviews. Whilst the researcher will ultimately be responsible for what is researched, and how research is conducted, it the capacity of the semi-structured interview to respond to issues that concern respondents can provide women with a practical contribution in deciding what, and how, issues are explored. Anderson & Jack state that 'the interview provides the opportunity to tell her own story *on her own terms*' (1991 p.11, my italics). This opportunity should not be overstated as the researcher ultimately retains control over what is studied and how it is presented (Gluck &

Patai, 1991; Sangster, 1994), although interviewees may contribute in a variety of ways and comment on researcher's interpretations (Minister, 1991). When asked if they wished to comment on transcriptions, a mixture of responses was evident, and many interviewees did not wish to receive a transcription of the interview or to comment on it. Whilst the interview is of central importance to us, as researchers, it does not always represent a particularly important event to the interviewee and we cannot assume they will wish to be 'empowered' in its production. Stacey also suggests that the appearance of greater respect for and equality with women brings new dangers and may represent 'a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation' (1991 p.113), in the level of information that may be elicited and ethical problems of how to use such information. It is important to develop strategies to deal with this potential exploitation. An awareness of the strategies people employ whilst conducting interviews, and writing about any degree of conscious manipulation, is one means of dealing directly with the problem. As stated above, all interviewers manipulate aspects of their self-presentation and setting in order to present what they perceive to be a 'suitable' front. What is important is acknowledging how and why they have done this, and the potential effects it has had on the outcome of the interview.

2.4 Discourse analysis

The methodology has been influenced by the concept of discourse analysis (Parker, 1999; Wood & Kroger, 2000). This theoretical and methodological stance had the capacity to explore several of the key research issues in this project. This discussion focuses on the potentials of applying aspects of discourse analysis to textual information and interview data, and the influence of critical discourse

analysis in exploring the appropriation of dominant discourses. The potentials of applying a discourse analytic approach to studying the role of the ‘past in the present’ and, conversely, the present in reinterpreting the past are also explored.

2.4.1 Conversation and textual analysis

Although a distinction can be made in terms of conversational and textual analysis, and each may require particular tools and emphasis (Wood & Kroger, 2000), for the purposes of this discussion, and this methodology, discourse analysis is discussed in relation to spoken and written discourse. Researchers in the fields of philosophy, linguistics and sociology, such as Wittgenstein (1953), Austin (1962) and Garfinkel (1967) developed theories that utterances are not only *about* things, and have meaning, but they also actively *do* things. Wood & Kroger state, ‘Talk creates the social world in a continuous ongoing way; it does not simply reflect what is assumed to be already there’ (2000 p.4).

With reference to interviewees’ accounts, discourse analysis has influenced the ways in which interviews were conducted, interpreted and presented. Some of the tenets of conversation analysis (e.g: Sacks, 1984) have informed the methodology with reference to interview data. For instance, where women have evidently ‘worked through’ particular issues, perhaps leaving gaps and pauses, or repeating particular words and phrases, these have been left in the final presentation and incorporated into analysis. It should be emphasised, however, that a strict form of conversation analysis, or a particular emphasis on this methodology has not been adopted in this research project given the remit of research issues and the need for a more encompassing methodology.

Discourse analysis has also influenced the methodological approach towards textual material. The primary written sources analysed were ‘popular’ sources read by a wide range of Shetland people, including newspapers, local magazines and ‘popular’ histories, as well as ‘official’ literature, such as SERAD publications. These sources, which were analysed from the early twentieth century up to the present day, were not considered as necessarily reflecting conditions that pertained to the time, but as mediums in which particular ideas were expressed, and which actively contributed to the creation and maintenance of particular conditions. For instance, the representation of women in a very ‘traditional’ female role in local newspaper articles for much of the twentieth century, and their lack of representation as active crofters, is explored as an expression of particular values that were reiterated through the use of particular mediums.

2.4.2 Critical discourse analysis

The methodology has been influenced by aspects of critical discourse analysis (e.g: Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Kress, 1996), which emphasises the ways in which the interests of dominant groups may be promulgated ‘through special access to, and control over, the means of public discourse and communication’ (van Dijk, 1996 p.85). Critical discourse analysis places an emphasis on written texts, media discourse and fictional texts of various kinds (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

In order to address the primary research issues, it was necessary to redress Shetland’s ‘closed society’ image, prevalent in much research (Black, 1995), and to relocate it within a wider context, reflecting its links with the rest of Britain and elsewhere (chapter 1). In exploring this question, the methodology was influenced

by some aspects of critical discourse analysis. For instance, I explored the mechanisms by which Shetland women were aware of both local and non-local ‘dominant discourses’ regarding women. I addressed the ways in which particular interests may be represented, and how these were appropriated by women with regard to potentially conflicting discourses that they were confronted with. The dissemination of discourses through various mediums was explored. With reference particularly to ‘official’ texts, critical discourse analysis influenced the interpretation of whose interests were being represented, and why.

2.4.3 The ‘past in the present’ and the role of myths

The final area in which discourse analysis was employed was with regard to the role of the ‘past’ and ‘myths’ in contemporary society. Wood & Kroger state

Discourse analysts cannot offer opinions about whether a specific memory is accurate; they can, however, point to the ways in which such a memory and the criteria used to assess it have been constructed...[it is] analysis of how reality is represented (2000, pp.15-16).

My initial interviews with women revealed that there is a dominant discourse of ‘crofting women of the past’ which represents them as ‘local heroes’, which was referred to by some women during interviews (chapter 4). I identified this as a ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1957) which is instrumental in creating a sense of self identity for Shetland. Applying a discourse analysis approach, I explored the active role that this discourse has in the present day, by influencing some women’s perceptions of their own lives in crofting. Their ‘memories’ of crofting were constructed with reference to this communal dominant discourse. Conversely, the ‘past’ is reinterpreted with reference to modern-day values and ideals. As Wood & Kroger (2000) note, the way a person constructs a narrative depends on other

people involved and the circumstances they are situated in. Thus I was forced to consider my role as researcher in influencing women's reinterpretation of their pasts.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodology adopted represents an amalgamation of several approaches, which overlap with each other to varying extents to comprise an approach that fits closely with the research issues. Wood & Kroger advise adopting 'a kind of made-to-order rather than off-the-rack discourse analysis, a bricolage, in recognition of the different concerns of researchers' (2000 p.25) and it is this kind of adaptive approach that characterises the overall methodology adopted here. Above all, the methodology is characterised by the flexibility to respond to new research issues and develop accordingly, ensuring that the research questions retain central focus and the task of finding the answers is not constrained by a pre-determined approach and set of methods. In line with feminist and qualitative research issues, the potential ethical implications of conducting interviews with women, and the uses of interview material, have been explored and have contributed to the final presentation of this research project. In all aspects, the methodology retains a focus on the primary 'data' as living women, as opposed to inanimate objects, which not only means that it is informed by ethical issues, but also offers the potential to explore the research issues to their fullest potential.

1. The 'ethical' considerations do not refer to any potential impact of the interview process on Duncan, who, like the interviewees he encountered, thoroughly enjoyed the experience! Rather, I was concerned about making the interview process potentially *too* informal, to the extent that the women might forget they were in an interview situation.
2. 'Unken' means unknown, or 'stranger'. 'Soothmoother' is the word that Shetlanders use to describe a person who has come to Shetland through the 'south mouth' (sooth mooth) of the Lerwick harbour, and is applied to English and Scottish people.

Chapter 3

CONTEXTUALISING 'WOMEN IN CROFTING' WITHIN WIDER RESEARCH INTO 'WOMEN IN FARMING'

3.1 Introduction

The following chapters of this thesis which describe the changing nature of women's participation in crofting, and the shifting role that crofting plays in their lives, reveal many similarities, and some differences, between Shetland crofting women and other women who live and work on farms. This chapter is a literature review of research into the lives of farming women, which contextualises the following discussion of Shetland women within wider issues of gender relations, shifting work patterns and changing agricultural circumstances. This review draws on European, North American, Australian and New Zealand research.

Sommestad (1995) suggests that rural women's history has been considered in terms of English and American cases, which, she suggests should be presented as particular case studies. She contrasts the ideology of separate spheres as being a part of women's lives in England and the United States, with poorer and less commercialised areas, such as Scandinavia and the French Alps (Sommestad, 1995). She suggests that detailed, comparative studies of specific farms and regions are necessary to demonstrate the varying positions of farming women. As a detailed case study, it is hoped that this research will highlight the diversity, as well as commonality, of experience between crofting women and other farming women.

3.2 Research into women and farming

Since the late 1970s, the role of women in farming has been the focus for a large body of research (e.g: Gasson 1981; Sachs, 1983; O'Hara, 1997), reflecting the rise in research into women's lives more generally and the fact that women's 'traditional' role within the family farm has altered radically in recent times.

3.2.1 Making women visible

Research into women and farming has predominantly focussed on documenting women's contribution to family farms in an attempt to make this contribution, which has traditionally been under-represented, more visible (e.g: Gasson, 1981; Sachs, 1983; Reimer, 1986; Keating and Little, 1994; Alston, 1995). Because farm women have been primarily considered as farm 'wives', and because married women's work outside the sphere of paid employment has tended to be viewed as 'unproductive' (O'Hara, 1997), their role within the context of the family farm has been undervalued (Beale, 1986) and defined as 'housework'. Thus, research into women and farming has been instigated by the desire to establish what farm work women actually do, to acknowledge their role within farming, and to value them accordingly.

Ghorayshi states 'Lack of recognition of women's work and their subordinate position within the family have affected women's self-image and their definition of work ...Even when women are in charge of operating the farm, they have a difficult time defining themselves as farmers' (1989 p.583). Issues surrounding articulation regarding women's roles as farmers have received considerable attention (e.g: Ghorayshi, 1989; Brandth, 1994). Identifying women as visible and

valued members of the farming enterprise thus involves a process of redefinition and a move away from male perspectives to explore women's experiences as constitutive in shaping and describing farming and rural life (Whatmore, et. al., 1994). This has methodological implications, and research in this field has been dominated by qualitative methods and in depth interviews with women (e.g: Brandth, 1994; Heenan & Birrel, 1997; Bennet, 2001). In addition to focusing on *their* perspectives of farming, this reflects the fact that, traditionally, methods of data collection and research frameworks have had the effect of ignoring, or concealing farm women's roles (Ghorayshi, 1989). For instance, because the man, occupationally, is usually defined as 'the farmer', statistical analysis will fail to encompass the farm work done by his wife, although she may contribute greatly to farm work (O'Hara, 1994).

Women's lack of recognition with regard to crofting was noted in chapter 1, and, theoretically and methodologically this project is informed by similar issues as have dominated research into women and farming. Shetland crofting women face many of the same problems of articulation, in terms of their role, as other farming women. Similarly, their role is often subsumed and downplayed, particularly by themselves in their own accounts. In-depth interviews provide the means to explore the nature of women's contribution to crofting, and to allow them to express this contribution in their own language.

3.2.2 Gender inequalities within the family farm

The 'family farm' has traditionally been taken as a naturalised entity, and one in which gender relations have been taken as 'given', rather than being open to

question (Ghorayshi, 1989). Research research, predominantly conducted from a feminist perspective, has sought to identify power differentials within farm families (Berlan Darque, 1988; Blanc & McKinnon, 1990; Whatmore, 1991b; 1994; Brandth, 1994; Shortall, 1999). Inequalities are inherent within the family farm, to the extent that, whilst women may participate to a high degree in farming, it is almost always the men who inherit the land (O'Hara, 1997; Shortall, 1999). Shortall (1999) notes that inequalities are connected with, and extend beyond, patrilineal succession. Gender inequalities exist in relation to prestige, agricultural knowledge, decision making and other resources (Berlan-Darque, 1988; Leckie, 1996; O'Hara, 1994; Shortall, 1999). Work, too, is generally divided according to gender (Brandth & Bolso, 1991; Leckie, 1996), and the fact that women tend to be less involved in 'direct production' means that their work is accorded a lower value. However, research shows that these inequalities are naturalised, and even 'masked' within the 'family farm' ideology (Ghorayshi, 1989; Whatmore, et. al., 1994). The idea that everyone is 'mucking in together' to keep the farm running, fails to acknowledge that some family members may be engaged in unequal power distributions as compared with others. 'Mucking in' does not equate with equality, however, within family farming discourses it has traditionally been held to do so. The implications of identifying gender inequalities within the family farm extend beyond the boundaries of academic research, and accepted concepts of the family farm are inscribed in social policy (Whatmore, et. al., 1994), without considering the complexity of women's roles.

In terms of gender divisions and inequality, Shetland crofting women face similar circumstances to farming women more generally. There is a popular discourse in

Shetland that men and women are equal, or, in its most exaggerated form, that Shetland is a matriarchal society. This idea is partly based on the fact that women have participated in physical aspects of croft work, and that they were working together with men for the common good. This research project reveals that, contrary to the popular image, gender inequalities are inherent within Shetland society today, as they were in the past. Inequality in Shetland ranges from a preference for male family members to ‘inherit’ crofts, to inequalities in decision making and management.

3.2.3 Changing role of agriculture

Whilst a substantial body of research into women and farming has been from a sociological direction and has focussed on women’s contemporary experience, some research has explored women’s role in farming from a longer time perspective (e.g: Brandth, 1994; O’Hara, 1994; Shortall, 1999). Wonneberger, Lasch & Elger (1994) have explored the psycho-social effects of agricultural modernisation on German women. Changes in agricultural production, and particularly the impact of mechanisation, in the social construction on women farmers in Norway in terms of ‘changing femininity’ have been explored by Brandth (1994), and O’Hara (1994) identifies the increasing significance of off-farm employment to family farms. An interesting feature to arise from this research is the fact that, whilst faced with changing social, technological and economic circumstances, women’s role in farming continues to operate within ‘traditional’ gendered orders, which are accepted as part of the cultural heritage (Gasson, et. al.1988; Shortall, 1992; 1999; Whatmore, 1994). Research has shown that farming does not operate in a vacuum, and draws upon more general social

discourses of gender (Haugen, 1994). In Norway, although legislation was passed in 1974 to regulate the succession of farms to be based on age and not gender, women continue to be disinherited, reflecting different attitudes between men and women and gendered socialisation processes (Haugen, 1994).

Particularly in relation to changes in technology and the mechanisation and ‘masculinization’ of farming (Gasson, et. al., 1988; Almaas, et.al, 1993; Brandth, 1994), and off-farm employment (e.g: Gasson, 1984; Blekesaune et. al., 1993; O’Hara, 1994), there are striking similarities between women in Shetland farming women elsewhere.

3.2.4 Resistance and co-operation

Whilst the inherent inequalities within farming families remains a continuing source of debate, recent research has tended to view gender inequalities as a more complicated web of gendered relations and have accorded women with some agency in the creation and resistance of such relations (Haugen, 1994; O’Hara, 1994, 1998; Bennett, 2001). O’Hara (1994) demonstrates that, whilst farming women in Ireland operate within a patriarchal structure, they have created their own spheres of influence and are involved in decision making, production and consumption. Bennett expresses a ‘frustration with theorisings of patriarchy that too easily assume the lack of agency of women and their constant powerlessness’ (2001 p.1) and demonstrates ways in which farm women in Dorset exert considerable power within the farm family through kin networks and gendered roles.

Ascribing women with a degree of agency was a major consideration during this research project, and it is one which developed as the research progressed. For instance, initially, I was concerned with making women's contribution to crofting visible, and identifying gender inequalities. I was concerned that women should be identified as 'crofters', and the earlier working titles for the thesis employed the expression 'women crofters'. However, having conducted preliminary interviews I realised that 'crofter' was not a term that women generally used to describe themselves and that there were other aspects of their identities, as mothers and housewives, that they were keener to express than their agricultural roles. I became aware that they were active agents in the construction of their crofting identities, and in the construction of gendered relations. I developed a respect for the ways in which the women defined themselves. Whilst I continued to explore gender divisions and inequalities, and the impact this has on Shetland women's lives, I tried to avoid imposing my values, which might contrast significantly from the values of the women I interviewed, and to explore power relations as a complex, on-going process in which both men and women are involved.

3.3 Similarities and differences

Many of the issues explored in this thesis are informed by the wider body of research into women and farming. For instance, this thesis is informed by the need to make women's contribution to crofting realistically visible, to explore the impact of gendered relations in crofting and women's agency in their creation, and to explore the impact of agricultural shifts on Shetland women's lives.

Reference is made to comparative data throughout the following discussion

chapters. However, this research explores women's lives within a particular agricultural and social context, and comparisons between Shetland women's lives and farming women elsewhere should be made sensitively, following Sommestad's (1995) advice to avoid making simplistic generalisations between rural women's lives.

Initially, it would appear that women crofting in the earlier part of the twentieth century faced quite different conditions to farming women elsewhere, especially women on larger, more prosperous farms. Women who fall into this category have traditionally had a role which has been centred on the house (Hennan & Birrell, 1997), in terms of demanding domestic work and duties such as feeding hired help, as well as participating in a range of 'female' agricultural responsibilities, such as feeding hens. It should be noted, however, that this type of image is probably a slightly misrepresentative one based on a lack of understanding and recording of farming women's roles in non-domestic sphere. A proscribed, and primarily domestic, role was rare for crofting women, who participated in most aspects of croft work. The clearest contrast between the work of a woman on a croft and the work of a woman on a farm is evident from the following account. Libby spent her younger years on a farm, where her father was farm manager, and her mother was, effectively, the farmer's wife. The farm was focussed on cattle, and several farm hands were employed. The mother's role was firmly domesticated. Libby's father and the farm hands did all the milking of the cows (whilst on crofts, milking was generally women's work). Her mother did not participate in any aspects of agricultural work. Instead her time was occupied caring for her family and cleaning the farmhouse, which was far bigger than the

average croft house. Her domestic chores were greatly added to by the fact that she had to cook for the farm workers. Libby revealed a contrast between the work of her mother as a farmer's wife, and the work of crofting women, including herself.

Oral accounts reveal that the average day in the life of a crofting woman in the 1930s was arduous and varied. Whilst croft work was divided along gendered lines (chapter 4), women participated to a high degree in most aspects of croft work. Many women recall waking early to light or stir the fire, before putting on tea for breakfast, although in some houses men would do this. There would be butter to make, and women baked most days. Oatcakes and bannocks (flatbreads) were a staple of the family's diet. An evening meal might consist of fish and tatties, and women would cook this. Washing was a heavy task, which Lizzie remembers was done on a Monday, as it was considered slovenly to leave it later in the week. Before the introduction of water into the houses, women might take their washing to a burn and light a fire there to boil the water. By the 1930s, many women were buying more food, including bread, cakes, sugar and tea. When not busy with something else (or at the same time as something else, such as walking to the peat stack), women were constantly knitting. My grandmother recalls that they were never without their 'makkin'' or 'sock' (knitting). Women's croft work included caring for and milking the cow, looking after the hens and collecting the eggs and tending any crops as necessary. Women's work, like men's work, was dependent upon the season. The spring, Voar, was a very busy month, with cultivation usually beginning about late March. The older women in the sample recall working in teams of three, 'delling' (digging) the ground in preparation for

sowing. One woman, Bertha, recalls how her father made her a special small spade when she was a child, and her desire to 'keep up' with the other diggers. Traditionally, men would have attempted to have the peat cutting done before they left for the spring fishing. Women were responsible for raising and stacking peats, a job in which the whole family participated. When spring grass became available, cattle and calves were put out to graze. The care of the cattle was primarily women's work. Cattle were kept in the byre at night and tethered during the day. Butter making took place nearly every day during the summer. Older children would help with this and caring for the cattle. Late summer, or early autumn, began with hay making in late July. Older respondents recall this as heavy work which occupied most of their time at that time of year. Women recall turning the hay regularly using hay forks, before stacking it into 'dresses' (hay stacks). In mid-October, the tattie crop was lifted and stored in a taatie croo for use during the rest of the year. There was less 'outside' croft work to do during the winter, although livestock still had to be fed. This was a time when work was 'caught up' on. For men, it would be a chance to mend nets, shoes, make 'kishies' (baskets worn over the chest) and the older women recall it as a time when they would knit as much as possible. Given that they sometimes had to walk considerable distances to barter their knitting at the merchants, some women recall that few of these journeys were made and they would have a large amount of knitting to trade by the spring. Because the croft and house were situated together, women tended to fit their croft work around their family responsibilities, and likewise. Because the extended family was common, women might spend much of their time caring for elderly relatives, as well as children. Matty, aged 96 at the time of the interview, recalls how, at one time, she was caring for three

elderly relatives and that she was completely ‘worn out’, although it should be noted that the extended family arrangements had positive aspects in terms of elderly, and other, relatives providing childcare and assisting in particular tasks. This picture of an ‘average’ crofting woman’s responsibilities challenges popular perceptions of farming women. However, similarities and differences must be considered in ways that extend beyond the nature of women’s agricultural participation. For instance, Shetland crofting women ‘of the past’ faced many similar circumstances to other farming women, in terms of unequal access to resources, and in terms of the ways in which they evaluate the work they did.

The changing roles of women and crofting are explored in chapter 4, and there is probably more variation between Shetland crofting women today, than in the example given above. This is due partly to greater variation in what constitutes a ‘croft’, partly as a result of croft amalgamation pursued from the 1950s onwards, which has meant that a ‘croft’ might represent one holding, or an amalgamation of 10 or more individual crofts. Obviously, in these cases, where crofts are being effectively run as sheep farms, it would be expected that women might participate to a higher degree, especially in terms of book keeping, feeding, vet visits and buying feed, than a woman on a single croft. Women’s participation in non-croft employment would also inevitably be influenced by the size of croft, the resulting potential income from the croft, and the amount of time she spent engaged in croft-related work. However, the majority of younger women crofting today engage in non-croft employment. This is usually of a part time nature, determined by the need to ‘fit in’ with family, and to a lesser extent, croft responsibilities. Few crofters in Shetland keep cows or hens, and crofting is dominated by sheep.

Sheep work is concentrated at particular times of the year, and women participate in it to varying degrees. Women perform various tasks on the croft, but, in comparison to their forebears, their participation is far less in terms of time as well as physical effort. Recent trends in farm women's participation in off-farm employment, and the ways in which agriculturalists' lives are entwined with general policy developments, inevitably heightens the similarities between Shetland crofting women and farming women elsewhere.

3.4 Conclusion

The similarities between crofting and farming women should encompass a wider consideration of rural women's lives. Chapter 4 shows that women perceives themselves as 'similar', in terms of lifestyle and values, to other rural women, whilst distinguishing themselves from non-rural women. Research into the lives of farming women generally, and Shetland crofting women, reflects the fact that women's lives can rarely be compartmentalised into categories such as 'work', 'family' and 'leisure', and that a more open approach produces more meaningful results.

Chapter 4

THE SHIFTING ROLE OF CROFTING: THE 1930S TO THE PRESENT DAY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores two main issues. The first is the changing role of crofting in Shetland in women's lives since the 1930s. The second issue explores the extent to which crofting *continues* to be an important factor in structuring women's identity in Shetland. This analysis reflects the need to explore how differences between women are developed and expressed, and how gender identities are constructed with reference to specific conditions (Stebbing, 1984; Scott, 1988; Frager, 1999). A review of case studies from Europe and the United States reveals a diversity of rural women's experiences (Sommestad, 1995) which warns against assuming a commonality of experience, and highlights the importance of 'grounding' research in relation to circumstances such as age and ethnicity.

Three major shifts in women's perceptions of their lives in crofting are evident since the 1930s. The first of these is a process whereby many women find it harder to relate to the agricultural aspects of crofting. Younger women often express feelings of marginalization from the 'main', productive, work of crofting, which they interpreted primarily as 'men's' work. This development is due to several factors, including a shift from subsistence production to a concentration on sheep production for cash income, and the increasing mechanisation of croft work.

The second shift is that younger women interpret crofting as ‘less important’ in their lives than older women. Their participation in crofting is assessed in relation to their participation in other spheres, such as paid employment or home-making. The decreasing importance of the croft in many women’s lives is due to socio-economic developments, whereby the croft is no longer essential to a family’s well-being, but is more often the provider of a, comparatively, insignificant form of subsidiary income¹.

The third major shift in interpretation is from a perception of crofting as inherently entwined with domestic work, to more clearly identifying with crofting as a form of ‘employment’. This shift in interpretation is primarily due to the fact that women interpreted their ‘croft work’ in a way that accords with more general ideas about what constitutes appropriate ‘women’s roles’. In the earlier twentieth century in Britain women were primarily defined in relation to their domestic roles. This domestic discourse provided an ‘ideal’ for women to live up to, even if it failed to reflect the reality of their lives. Older women interpret their participation in crofting within this ‘domestic angel’² discourse. In the later twentieth century, women have increasingly faced pressures to contribute financially to their families, as well as fulfil a domestic role. Younger women’s reinterpretation of crofting as a ‘job’ is due to the appropriation by women in Shetland of a discourse of women’s roles that expects women to engage in paid employment in addition to being primarily responsible for child-rearing and home-making. This issue is explored against a background of profound communication developments since the 1930s, and the opening up of new avenues for the dissemination of ideas and practices.

Crofting emerges as a fluid concept which is redefined by women in relation to changing circumstances and within shifting discourses of women's roles. This fluidity, however, is combined with the fact that it continues to act as a *point of reference* that women define themselves in relation to during interviews. Women defined themselves as 'different', to varying degrees, to non-crofting, and particularly non-rural, women. A striking homogeneity is evident in women's accounts with reference to the meanings they attach to crofting, and it is evident that crofting has some very strong, and relatively stable, connotations.

4.2 The changing role of the croft and shifts in meaning for women

4.2.1 Introduction

The meanings that women attach to crofting, and the impact it has in structuring their personal identity, have shifted due to changes in croft work, the changing agricultural and economic role of the croft and shifts in what women define as 'important' in their lives. Throughout the twentieth century, and particularly since the World War II, crofting in Shetland has moved away from subsistence production towards the specialised production of sheep for cash income and subsidy payments, which has had major implications for women. Of primary importance is a shift in the nature of croft work, which is now more concentrated at particular times of the year and which has become increasingly mechanised. Women's daily routine is not entwined with crofting to the same extent as it was in the past, and particularly prior to the 1950s, and many aspects of croft work, particularly those associated with machinery, are almost exclusively defined by women as being 'masculine'. As a result of this, women's roles with regard to

croft work have become less clearly defined and many have become marginalized into a subsidiary role (in relation to men). A further development is that crofting is, in many cases, interpreted as ‘less important’ by younger women, in comparison to older women’s interpretations. In economic terms, crofting has shifted from being an essential provider of subsistence produce, which was often vital to a family’s survival, to being, at the most, the provider of a subsidiary form of income, and, at the least, a ‘hobby’, usually for men. However, its categorisation by some women as a ‘hobby’ does not mean it is ‘unimportant’, as the croft work (even if uneconomically viable), and croft itself, is imbued with symbolic importance in the structuring of social relations and provides links with ‘the past’, and with a Shetland ‘sense of identity’ (see chapters 4 and 5).

4.2.2 ‘I’m the helper’

The general picture of prolonged absences of men in sea related industries in the earlier twentieth century (see chapter 1), and the higher ratio of women to men in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which was particularly evident at some times, as in the aftermath of the World War I, meant that women were often primarily responsible for running crofts for potentially long periods of time. Their lives were fundamentally entwined with croft work and they were involved in the direct production of croft produce. This essential role often started in their childhood and one respondent, Matty, now in her late nineties recalled staying off school, at the age of eleven, in order to help during the *Voar* (Spring). The examples provided below suggest that it was quite common for children to be granted leave from school if their help at home was deemed necessary.

One woman, who was born in 1903, revealed how, after the death of her father, her mother went away to work at the herring gutting during the summer. This interviewee's older sister, aged eight at the time, was given exemption from school in order to care for her siblings in her mother's absence.

She hed ta bake and whin she couldna git up ta da table she hed a wee stool ta stand on...And oh she did really, really good. Bit oh hit wis pretty miserable at home (JH, SA3/1/10)

Several women I interviewed recalled that they or their sister were granted permanent exemption from school, or took time off school to assist with domestic and croft work at particular times of the year.

I was the youngest of six. My mother died when I was ten months old. She [older sister] wasna quite twelve, and four boys in between. She was the one that had to look after us. So she got leave from the school (Ina)

I was at school till I was about thirteen and then my dad was going to work to the Coonty, erecting bridges. And so he applied and got me exempt from school to do the croft work while he went to work. So I left at thirteen (Babsie)

The necessity of women's participation in croft work often determined the career choices that they made. Some respondents describe a situation in which they had little choice but to work on their families' crofts, despite the fact that they may have liked to participate in other forms of paid employment.

I suppose I might've likit to have been a teacher. Of course, things didna work oot that wye because when I left the school I was needed at hom (Bertha)

At one point, it must've been after the war too, there were quite a boom in the herrin' fishin'. And me and Maggie thought we were going to go to this. You went in threes. But it never came to pass! The folks needed you at hom and so you just stayed hom (Ruby)

I wanted to leave Shetland. I had notions of doin' somethin' on the stage. I'd put on wee things at the church and dat and I likit singin, performin! But as soon as I left school, I wis needed hom on the croft. There wis the younger bairns, no mam, and aye so much croft work needin' done...(Katie)

In the 1930s, and up until after the World War II, the croft provided a wide range of subsistence goods. Women's accounts, which are characterised by their homogeneity, reveal that most crofts had sheep, up to about a maximum of twenty, as well as between one and four cows, hens and maybe ducks, geese and a pig. Milk was churned at least once a week and, in addition to the butter, the by-products of the churning process included *kirn milk*, a kind of soft cheese, and *blaand*, a liquid refreshment. In addition to livestock, crops were grown on the croft. These included potatoes, turnip, cabbage, barley and hay. The croft provided for the majority of subsistence needs and provided feed for the animals. This diversity of produce, and lack of mechanisation, demanded a significant input in terms of time and effort by women. Women were involved, in some capacity, with their precise role being assigned by gender and age, with the majority of croft work, including feeding animals, milking, *rooing* sheep, sowing, tending and harvesting crops. Although there was a clear gender division of croft work, as well as between house and croft work, women were directly involved in

the production process, and older respondents attach as much, or more, significance to women's participation in crofting.

The women then haed to do the croftwork...dat wives haed to look after their families and work the croft as well because their men wis away at da herrin' (Matty)

It wis the women dat wis doin pretty much everything – men were off workin' you see...women had to do the croft work (Maggie)

Older respondents perceive their participation in crofting as an essential, and fundamental, role in something which was of vital importance. Even during the 1930s and 1940s, when cheap, imported foodstuffs were becoming more readily available (Hunter, 1991), the croft was still an important source of provisions. One woman, recalling crofting as a child in the 1940s states,

Noo I appreciate that we did it...and how well we were off really, because you think aboot people that lived on their means and they were just dependent on their employment. And we were never starving, we always had milk, meat, and I think we were probably better aff as some (Netta)

Pearson (1985) suggests that self sufficiency was the main aim of crofting up to 1947. However, even after that date the croft represented an important provider of a wide range of subsistence produce, especially at a time when there was a lack of employment opportunities for both men and women, prior to the 1960s.

Sometimes when you're just...dead beat, you think why am I working at this? But...there was that few jobs. It made a difference and you had your own vegetables, own animals...it made a great difference (Jean)

There wisna the sam amount of money den-a-days...people weren't

earning the pay packets they do now, that didn't really start till after oil...and things were expensive so having the croft really was a good thing for some veg and your meat (Mary)

4.2.3 Process of marginalization of women in the shift to sheep production

Twentieth century crofting in Shetland, as elsewhere (e.g. Mewett, 1977; Ennew, 1980) has witnessed a dramatic shift from subsistence production to a concentration on sheep production for cash income. The greatest change in the land use of cultivated areas in Shetland has occurred since 1955, with a substantial increase in area devoted to fodder crops, primarily hay and silage, and intensive pastures (Heineberg, 1973). By the 1970s self-sufficiency was a 'hippy' dream' (Pearson, 1985 p.214). The move away from subsistence crofting, combined with increasing mechanisation and a recent trend of falling livestock prices³, at a time when new and increased employment opportunities have become available to both men and women, has had major implications for women's perceptions of crofting. The underlying causes of this shift away from subsistence production are explored prior to discussing the impact this has had on Shetland women's lives. These underlying causes include a prevailing discourse of 'professional/scientific' farming which influenced the ways in which crofting was thought about and practised for much of the twentieth century; the increasing availability of relatively cheap, imported foodstuffs; government intervention aimed at 'improving' crofting; and a shift in the working patterns of both men and women.

4.2.3.1 *Professional discourse of crofting*

The shift from subsistence crofting to production driven crofting must be

contextualized within the appropriation of a professional, and masculine, discourse evident in Shetland from the early twentieth century when attempts were made to improve crofting produce and introduce scientific farming methods. The Walls and District Agricultural Society was established in 1913 (Nicolson, 1987), and the Shetland Flock Book Society in 1926, with the remit of improving pure Shetland sheep through selective breeding (Black, 1995). An abundance of newspaper articles in the local press⁴ provided information on scientific techniques and guidelines for production and an article in the Shetland News in 1930s states that a young farmer ‘must have a through scientific and technological knowledge of agriculture’ (Shetland News, 20th February, 1930 p.7). This attitude was not exclusive to Shetland, but was applied to crofting generally (chapter 1). For instance, Darling states ‘If we are to make West Highland crofting serve as a whole-time job for a man, with the occasional help of his family, we must intensify the quality of our cultivation’ (1945 p.96). This reveals a clear definition of crofting as primarily a male occupation, which could provide full time income if ‘improved’. A continuing emphasis on professionalizing crofting is evident in Caird & Coull’s survey of Yell, which was conducted in the 1960s. They state ‘the sheep husbandry of Yell is disorganised and largely unprofitable, and is according to a traditional system which is little in line with the needs of modern farming’ (Caird & Coull, 1963 p.8). The future of crofting was seen in terms of agricultural modernisation and ‘the later 1960s gave every hope that it [agricultural improvement in Shetland crofting] would be sought by young go-ahead men pioneering modern methods’ (Donald, 1983 p.212). Concurrent with the professional discourse, is a masculine discourse. A newspaper extract from 1920, written for the Glasgow Evening Times, and

reprinted in the Shetland News, clearly perceives of crofting as a male pursuit.

When the seed box is filled and strapped firmly over his shoulders...the sower prepares for action. He discards his coat, rolls up his sleeves, and with head thrown back, he takes his handfuls of the golden grain and scatters the seed broad-cast, to right and left over the field. Just for one moment the women folk gaze after him, reverence and submission in their looks. For them, the sower appears to be invested with the power of some ancient deity whom they have appeased with sacrifice. He assumes god-like proportions' (Shetland News, 3rd April, 1920 p.2).

This extract, based on the reporter's visit to a Shetland croft, is only a romanticised version of the masculine discourse of crofting evident in 'official' publications and directives. In 1951, when the Shetland Agricultural Advisory Committee was searching for an 'experimental croft' they state

What the Committee is looking for is a croft with a hill scattald share of which some 50 acres could be broken in. The crofter will have to be an active *man* who is prepared to apply to the Land Court for the apportionment of his scattald' (Shetland Times, 12th January, 1951 p.7, my italics).

A HIDB statement reveals a perception of a clear separation of men's and women's roles, which ignores women's participation in the livestock production process, 'the Shetland industry is essentially a cottage-based one, very much dependent on outworkers. These workers, in many cases the *wives and daughters* of the wool growers' (Highlands and Islands Development Board Publication, 1970, my italics). In this statement, the men are the 'wool growers', and the women are defined only in terms of their relationship to the wool growers, or the 'producers'. A change in attitude, by the later twentieth century, is evident in the joint publication by the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU) and Royal Society for the

Protection of Birds (RSPB), in which the term ‘retired crofter’ (1992 p.54) is applied to a woman, as opposed to a term such as ‘crofter’s wife’, thus acknowledging her as a ‘crofter’ in her own right.

4.2.3.2 *Changing employment patterns*

The move from subsistence production in Shetland can be attributed to the coming of steady, full employment (Johnson, 1985; Pearson, 1985). Similar processes are evident in other crofting areas (e.g: Mewett, 1977). As one respondent states,

Women that would otherwise would’ve been at home most of the time now [the 1970s] could go out and get part-time jobs or even full time jobs. And I certainly had a full time job even though Jane must have been nine or ten (Joanne)

Shifts in both men’s and women’s employment patterns meant less time for croft work, and influenced the move away, in Shetland, from a wide range of subsistence produce to less intensive sheep rearing (Pearson, 1985). Pearson (1985) suggests that employment opportunities available during the oil boom in the 1970s led to a further decline of interest in crofting, as the yield from crofts could not hope to equal potential wages. Changes in women’s paid employment patterns evident from the 1960s (see below) meant that women had less time for croft work. One respondent describes the impact of women’s employment on crofting at the present time and defines it as a major factor in changing croft work,

They’re all working...they all have jobs. That’s the main income.

Crofting seems, to me, just to be a nothing (Mary)

Another two respondents describe the process of moving entirely to sheep production due to the demands of paid employment,

We were both working [from the 1970s] so...we each had our job and

we had the kye besides. And a few sheep and...we haed sheep in the hill too. When you were going out to work, you had to be up in the morning and you had to get it done afore you went to work. And in the winter time when the kye was in the byre...And you had to feed the sheep too...But we ended up doing away wi' the kye and just having a few sheep (Peggy)

When we moved in here in '51 we still had kye...I was in a job then, I was cook at the school canteen. And me faither was still at sea. And I couldna manage it. And so we put aff the kye and just kept sheep. It was easier to manage. And also gied up much of the cultivation you see, and just had it for grazing for the sheep (Ruby)

Full employment also contributed to the process of croft amalgamation because, when crofts became vacant, young people were not taking up crofts to the same extent as previously as it was perfectly possible to live well without one (Johnson, 1985). These were often subsequently bought up by larger scale crofters who pursued a programme of croft amalgamation and concentrated on sheep production.

4.2.3.3 *Imported foodstuffs*

The availability of cheap, imported foodstuffs in crofting areas from the beginning of the twentieth century had a profound effect on the move from subsistence production. As Hunter states 'As a money economy took hold...the croft was less a sources of supplies for the table, more a provider of hard cash' (Hunter, 1991 p. 29). A number of respondents reveal an initial (in the case of those entering into crofting in the 1980s and 1990s), or continuing, commitment to various levels of

self-sufficiency, which was abandoned due to the ready availability of relatively cheap produce.

I wrought vegetables up to a couple of year ago, but then I think it was working oot mair expensive as buyin' them! (Inga)

We did hae tatties, but by the time that you've got the seed and planted it, I would have to do the hoeing and the weeding, and take them up, and its cheaper to buy them (Frances)

Hens is no worth the effort. You can buy good eggs, they dig up the flooers and mak a mess and the feed's expensive (Mary)

We actually enjoyed cutting peats when we first came but quickly learned no, most people don't do that any more! Five years we cut and that was enough! I can see why everyone looked very wise when we said that's what we were doing (Eleanor)

The assessment of croft produce in economic terms is similar between older and younger women's accounts. Even women who were raised on subsistence crofts have reassessed the profitability of raising crops and keeping hens in terms of how easy or cheap it is to buy this produce.

4.2.3.4 *Market forces and government intervention*

Independent market forces and government interventionist policies have been instrumental in the shift of direction of Shetland crofting towards being more production driven. In Shetland, the transition from subsistence economy to market production, which was almost exclusively focussed on livestock breeding, began

c.1840 (ibid, 1973) and resulted in a stronger economic link with the markets on the Scottish mainland, since the local markets could not absorb the total volume of agricultural produce (Heineberg, 1973). In the World War I, increased demand led to rising prices and increased production and the absence of surplus labour meant that agriculture worked much closer to capacity and productivity improved (Black, 1995). Permanent improvements were, however, impaired as the increase in demand and high prices during this period did not continue (ibid, 1995). During the inter-war period livestock rearing, mainly sheep, replaced arable farming (ibid, 1995).

The introduction of mechanisation is a feature of Shetland crofting in the post the World War II period. During the World War II, the government made some effort to encourage modernisation in crofting agriculture, as part of a general drive to increase production in Britain (chapter 1) and, unlike the World War I, a degree of mechanisation was introduced to help crofters in the absence of labour (Black, 1995). A tractor scheme was established by the Department of Agriculture in 1941 and, by 1944, 29 tractors were at work in Shetland with a number of home conversions increasing this figure further (ibid, 1995). Several respondents recall the introduction of tractors in the 1950s and that people often hired them out, reflecting a feature of hiring contractors with machinery which characterises the post-war period (Heineberg, 1973). Several respondents noted the impact of mechanisation on crofting, in terms of the nature of croft work and the time required to do it.

This tractors and trikes and all...its just made a difference to everything. They never ken about crofting noo (Mary)

Crofting noo is all machinery...I would think that's haed about the biggest impact really, in whit's done, and whit needs to be done...jobs tak less time, and need less people obviously! (Marjory)

The hay has to be turned when you're working with hay. And we just stood at the rig and turned it wi' rakes. And I thought, this is crazy, we're standing here for oors when there's a tractor standing there that could do it in a fraction of the time. And I got John to learn me, and I could get the hay turned in just no time. Come back from the shop in me dinner time, turn the hay in me dinner oor and go back to the shop (Karen)

Ratter (1985) defines the changes in crofting as being shaped by existing legislation and the Crofters Commission, and Hunter (1991) highlights the effect of legislation on crofting since the 1930s. Government interventionist policy aimed at maximising output in Shetland and improving the backward agricultural structure of Shetland along with other marginal farming areas (Heineberg, 1973) is evident in the introduction of livestock subsidies in 1940-1 and the incentives to increase sheep production during the World War II (Black, 1995). The subsidies which, at the beginning of the 1950s, amounted to an average of £48,000 per annum (Heineberg, 1973), affected first and foremost livestock breeding, with less effect on cultivation, land reclamation and improvements in equipment and buildings (Hunter, 1991). One respondent describes subsidies as the most important factor in moving crofting away from subsistence production,

Britain then was being production driven in the fifties. Subsidies began creeping in on animals. Subsidies began to sound the death knell of

crofting. People began to try and make a complete living off crofting – they couldn't do it...instead of young people coming in and taking a croft just as a hobby or for some extra, it would be grabbed up either by a farm or some younger person (Stella)

Another describes how her husband, entering crofting in the 1950s, wished to make his living from crofting,

At the end of the day he hoped that he'd be able to be a full time crofter. That, I'm afraid, has never happened. Because like all crofters here in Shetland we really rely on other jobs. If it wasn't for the other jobs you could've said cheerio long ago to the crofts. It's very sad that people have to...the crofters, the men and women have to have other supplements (Lesley)

This account reveals the impact that production driven attitudes must have had on crofting after the World War II. Prior to this, based on recollections of the earlier twentieth century, people rarely assumed that they could make their living from crofting. Crofting was, in the majority of cases, the provider of subsistence produce which supplemented wages derived from participation in paid employment. The impact of this production driven discourse in the 1950s, and the policy directives of the time led some people to think that they could make their entire living from crofting. The problems that many faced are revealed in the statements above. Very few crofters in Shetland have been able to rely on their croft produce or earnings without additional income.

A process of amalgamation was actively encouraged by the Crofters Commission (e.g: The Crofters Commission, 1972). The 1955 Crofters Commission Act, which transferred the distribution of grants for crofting to a new Crofters Commission had major implications for croft improvements. This Act encouraged larger

holdings by amalgamation and gave crofters the right to apportion⁵ one's hill shares, and subsequently improve them as they were for exclusive use, whilst providing realistic grants for housing, land and fencing (Heineberg, 1973; Johnson, 1985; see chapter 1). From 1959 there was a considerable amount of apportionment in Shetland, until by the early 1970s almost all the readily accessible hill land was fenced and held by one crofter or another (Johnson, 1985). With the exception of livestock subsidies, the 1955 Act also increased the amounts of grants available to crofters (Heineberg, 1973).

4.2.4 Implications for women in the shift from subsistence production

The significant trends in crofting since the 1930s, primarily the shift from subsistence production, the increasing use of machinery and the recent fall in agricultural prices have all had major implications for the ways in which women perceive themselves in relation to crofting. The shift from subsistence production has, at a very fundamental level, had a major effect on the type and amount of work that women do. With the exception of one respondent who was particularly committed to 'traditional' crofting (producing a diversity of stock and crops and using native Shetland species), and who did so in the context of a tourist venture, none of the respondents I interviewed operated their croft at a subsistence, or similar, level. Very few kept hens and the only crops grown were potatoes (occasionally), and silage, with some growing a small amount of hay in addition to the silage.

4.2.4.1 *Less time spent on croft work*

There is a major shift in the amount of time that women spend doing agricultural

croft work. As stated above, a subsistence level croft required a high degree of input from women in croft work in terms of time and effort. Women particularly described the cleaning out, feeding and milking of cows as a time consuming and demanding job. A significant amount of women's work was taken up with daily, routine croft work. In addition, women participated in sowing, harvesting, *rooing* sheep and working with hay, work which was highly concentrated at particular times of the year. In contrast, sheep require comparatively low input in terms of time and effort. During the winter they require feeding each day, but apart from that the work is concentrated at lambing, clipping and market times⁶. A comparison of older and younger women's accounts reveals a significant reduction in the amount of time younger women spend on croft work. Not only is this a feature of their 'daily routine' work, but also of their participation in the 'concentrated work' such as clipping, lambing and the harvesting of what limited crops may be grown. Although many younger women (33% of the interview sample under the age of sixty-five) do participate fully in all aspects of sheep work, one woman in the sample did none of this type of work, and others (60% of the sample) assisted their husbands who did the majority of work with sheep. In addition, silage making is usually contracted out, to men working with large tractors, so working with hay, which was a laborious and time consuming job, is no longer a feature in women's lives.

The hay was just a full time job. It just took up most of wir summer.

Once we started in July to get hay cut we were practically at that girse till the hairst come on. Seven days a week (Babsie)

If we were working with hay when I was young it was all cut with a sythe. There wasn't even a cutter, a mower. It was cut with sythes and

turned by hand. It wasn't like now-a-days, done in an hour or two

(Mary)

We got contractors in maybe about four or five year ago, because the weather was that bad you couldnae really mak hay. So we decided to get a tractor in and work wi' the black bales (Karen)

This 'less input' factor has major implications in the meanings women attach to crofting, particularly at a time when they are becoming increasingly involved in alternative forms of work. Since the 1960s crofting women have increasingly 'gone out' to work, and many women 'measure' croft work against their participation in other forms of employment.

I couldna justify working on the croft instead of doing more 'oors at work or onything. The income we get fae me working is important – far more as the croft could ever make! (Frances)

I wouldna say the croft *influences* what other work I do – maybe influences when you tak holidays etc. It's the other way round – the croft would hae to fit in wi' my job (Joanne)

4.2.4.2 *Less time in direct production*

A further development is that the majority of younger women are no longer as involved in the *direct production* aspects of croft work as women were in the past. The concentration on sheep production, and the concentration of the highly visible work, including drenching, clipping and preparing sheep for market, into a short period of time, has had a direct influence on this. It is less easy for younger

women to identify with croft work, or to describe the nature of their participation in it, because they may not be primarily involved with the physically concentrated work with sheep at particular times of the year. As stated above, although many women do participate in this type of work, for many others it is associated primarily with men. The type of work done by women, when not directly involved in the physical process of production, can be difficult for them, and others, to define clearly. Some of the younger women (three-quarters of the younger women in the sample) used terms such as ‘helpers’, or ‘assistants’ to describe their participation in crofting.

I usually help...Maybe go to the vets and get any supplies that might be needed. Food. General dogsbody! (Louise)

Tom does all the heavier manual stuff, the ‘manly’ stuff – I’ll help out but I’m fairly redundant – it’s a case of standing around until he needs me (Laura)

I do nothing really – the men do it a’ (Marjory)

During the course of interviews, all three women quoted above described participating in varying aspects of croft work, but found it difficult to define their role as it was often not involved in direct production and was considered subsidiary to the work done by their husbands. The most extreme example of this is evident from the respondent, quoted above, who claimed to do ‘nothing really’. This woman found it very difficult to associate herself with croft work, or to describe the type of work she did on the croft. Her lack of involvement in croft management decisions, aspects of direct production, and physical work with sheep such as clipping and lambing, led to her assertion that she did no croft work.

During the interview it emerged that she walked the working dogs twice a day, for at least twenty minutes at a time. She also fed any *caddy* (orphan) lambs, and, during the lambing season, walked the fields about three times a day to check for lambing ewes. However, despite the fact that she spent approximately an hour of her day doing ‘croft work’, her subsidiary role and lack of clearly defined responsibilities made it hard for her to associate clearly with croft work or to acknowledge her participation as important. Whilst this example can be considered ‘extreme’, in that she claims to do ‘no’ croft work, it is simply an exaggerated version of the majority of women in the sample who ‘down play’ their role, in comparison to their men, and struggle to describe their role in crofting.

He [husband] does really the *main* work as you’d call it (Louise)

He [husband] does the majority...well, when I say he does the majority of work with the animals, I mean...I’m usually there helping. But he does all the catching and things (Frances)

Being a ‘crofter’ is something that many women associated with men, and a number of respondents envisaged leaving their crofts to their sons (even in those cases when they also had daughters).

**It’s a job to know if its going to be worthwhile for my son to tak ower
(Louise)**

I thought, well, some of the boys might be interested (Lizzie)

**My daughter and her husband have a big place and a lot of
kye...Although she hasna a son, a grandson for me. Its left wi' her
(Peggy)**

Many other younger respondents defined their decisions to enter crofting, or
continue crofting, as depending on their husband's relationship with crofting.

**I might never have married someone that was interested in crofting at
all, but if I did, I knew how to clip sheep and how to set tatties and neeps
and things (Frances)**

**John aye wanted to work on the croft and live up here, so at least I haed
some experience if it was to be needed (Karen)**

4.2.4.3 *The impact of mechanisation*

The mechanisation of many aspects of croft work has also had an impact on
women's perceptions of their role in crofting. One woman stated,

**The women now a days don't take part in crofting. The men do it wi' all
the machinery (Ruby)**

The majority of women interviewed felt that work with machinery is the sole, or
primary, preserve of men. Many women, both those of an age who have grown up
with tractors and those who were crofting prior to the introduction of machinery,
do no mechanised croft work. Their reasons for this range from the fact that they
simply do not enjoy it, to the belief that men are inherently better suited to this
type of work.

These big tractors are really for the men (Patti)

**A man is supposed to have a better mechanical brain isn't he? So it was
the men that worked wi' the machinery (Ruby)**

One woman states,

**I'd move the tractor or tae'in it through the rig, but I'd've needed
supervision! They wouldna just hae left me wi it!...The men were
maistly involved' (Netta)**

She then goes on to describe a specific incident and the feelings of achievement and pride that doing tractor work successfully inspired in her brother, clearly associating it with male work values. During the absence of her parents in hospital, her younger brother suggested taking the corn in with the tractor,

**He was delighted coz he wis just a young boy, and it was great that he
wis left to practice...All the corn wis gone and it wis a' in the yard...he
was quite chuffed. That was the impact of the tractor that gave
him....ken we weren't having to do it by carrying, he haed something to
play wi'! (Netta)**

There were, of course, women who could, and do, work with tractors, but they are defined as the exception rather than the rule. One woman describes her friend as being

very unusual in that she went and used the tractor (Ruby)

Another woman, from a Scottish farming labouring background states

**I think that for a number of folk they admired what I was doing here
because I did all the manly jobs – the plooin' and the tractor work and
everything and that was quite uncommon for a wife to do that (Lesley)**

Thus the vast majority of women in Shetland do not participate in a central aspect of contemporary croft work. Brandth & Bolso note the significance of machinery in 'maculinizing' agricultural work and state, with reference to Norway, 'The

masculinization of farming became particularly marked after the mechanization of agriculture. Operating machines became men's responsibility and the machines were important markers of the gendered division of labour in farming. Since technology indicates the distinction between what is masculine and feminine and is strongly attached to the gendered division of labour, it turns out to be an important symbol of gender. The tractor is therefore a strong masculine symbol (Brandth & Bolso, 1991).

Whilst this research is firmly focussed on women's experiences, informal discussions with men and participant observation reveal the importance of crofting as a defining factor in Shetland men's identity. Research previously conducted in this area (e.g: Cohen, 1979; 1987; Macdonald, 1997) has shown how men's participation in croft work identifies them as a 'man' as well as a member of the community. Whilst Cohen's findings may be criticised as overstating the symbolic aspects of crofting in comparison to the ways in which people perceive it within economic remits at the present day, this research project also highlights the symbolic importance of crofting to Shetlanders. For women, it is argued, this means something different than it does to men. For men, participating in physical croft work still appears to be an important facet of their identity and, as Cohen (1987) notes, helps to explain why people continue to participate in croft work when the economic returns are not worth the financial and physical output. Whilst both men and women share perceptions of crofting as being integral to a sense of 'being Shetland', for men the work aspect is comparatively more significant.

4.2.4.4 *Reduction in the financial importance of crofting*

In addition to women's feelings of alienation from certain aspects of croft work, the impact it has as a structuring factor in their identity has shifted dramatically since the 1930s as the importance of crofting, in terms of providing for one's family, in terms of subsistence provision and economic revenue, has reduced in recent years.

A process of increased demand for agricultural produce is outlined above, and is a feature of the post-1930 period. At times, during the twentieth century, crofting was making a realistic contribution to people's incomes. Sutherland and Bevan's survey of crofting incomes shows that, like Shetland, the main source of income in crofting areas generally was from off-croft employment, which was equal to about 60% of the total crofter and spouse income (2001). One respondent described changes that have occurred in the relative importance of subsidies in comparison to market prices, by recalling a time, in the 1950s, when lamb prices and wool prices were an important part of their income.

The year we moved here, 1958, wool was about £1 per kilo. And we, last year, were getting about twenty five pence a kilo. And back in those days a drum of sheep dip was £4 17s, now its £86 for two litres. The first year that we were crofting here I think the subsidy was two and sixpence per head subsidy. You were getting about eight or nine pounds for a good Shetland lamb So the subsidy was very insignificant in comparison to the value of your produce. Its been totally the other way round in the last few years. £29 of subsidy, and you were lucky to get £1 per ewe. And a lot of people, two year ago, shot and buried their smaller

lambs and their cast ewes (Stella)

This respondent highlights the decrease in the financial importance of croft income by showing the dramatic real drop in prices, as costs have continued to rise dramatically. In the late 1990s, therefore, crofting was neither providing subsistence produce, nor making a realistic contribution to a family's income. Even with the subsidies, which at the time of writing were £29 per sheep, some respondents state that crofting is costing them money in terms of feeding and animal welfare, echoing Sutherland and Bevan's (2001) findings. This shift in the economic importance of crofting has had a major impact on women's interpretations of their lives in relation to crofting. Some women describe it as a hobby, often one that is particularly pursued by their husbands.

I mean really we find the croft is just a hobby – it doesn't really pay back what you put in (Louise)

I see it as a waste of time really! I dinnae ken, I mean if they're no makin the money then what's the point? I suppose it's kinda a...hobby for the men, and they do enjoy it, but I don't know...it's hard to see the point o it sometimes (Marjory)

at the moment I think we're just basically kinda resting! We've discovered other hobbies. That are much more enjoyable! (Joanne)

Even for those respondents still committed to deriving an income from the croft, who clearly regard it as more than a hobby, they describe it as less important than in the past,

It's different because crofting now is not the main activity. It's a sideline.

For the majority of folk. Because really you can make nothing out of it! I

mean its not, what would the word be, economically viable!...you're getting half the prices that you would've got four year ago... if it carries on the way its going I really don't know... (Patti)

I think crofting can cause a lot of friction with fence lines, arguments have gone on. Just the same as a suburban garden. I think it probably was an important thing once upon a time. Because it was their livelihood, but that's not the case any more, it's a hobby for nearly everyone here (Eleanor)

4.3 The reinterpretation of crofting within shifting dominant discourses

4.3.1 Introduction

The meanings women attach to crofting, and the impact it has in structuring their identity, are formulated within the context of wider values and ideals that are important to women in Shetland. I will show that crofting has been 'reinterpreted' by women as they have embraced shifting ideas about 'women's roles' since the 1930s. The earlier part of the twentieth century was characterised by a dominant 'domestic angel' discourse, which many researchers trace back to a 'separation of spheres' following the industrial revolution and subsequent recodification of ideas about women in line with bourgeois ideals in the mid-nineteenth century (e.g: Alexander, 1994; Wood, 1994). Central to these new ideas was an emphasis on women as domestic beings, as primarily wives and mothers (ibid, 1994; ibid, 1994). Although this failed to match the experience of many, especially working-class, women, it was upheld as an *ideal* and influenced notions of respectability about married women and work (Coltrane, 1998; Bruley, 1999).

Since the 1950s, the emphasis has shifted and women are ‘ideally’ expected to work outside the home. Because they are also still expected to be primary carer and domestic worker (see Heenan & Birrell, 1997) a more ‘confused’ discourse of women’s roles has emerged (Wood, 1994). Wood states that ‘we live in a transitional time in which we no longer embrace former views of men and women, yet we haven’t become comfortable with alternative images of the sexes’ (1994 p.17). ‘Part-time’ work, or ‘secondary jobs for women’ are often presented as the ideal, allowing women to fulfil domestic responsibilities and contribute economically to the family (Gringeri, 1993 p.33). During interviews, women’s accounts reveal an appropriation of these shifting dominant discourses of women, work and the family, and the subsequent reinterpretation of crofting in line with shifting ideas about ‘women’s roles’.

The meanings women attach to crofting are not inherent in the nature of their participation in crofting, but in the *values* which women accord to their participation in crofting in relation to their participation in other roles. For instance, older women could have stressed their roles as agricultural workers as being of ‘primary importance’ in their lives, but instead they present this as secondary to their roles as wives and mothers (see Srebrnik, 1995). At the time of fieldwork I was aware of the ways in which I, similarly, weighted accounts of my own life, in particular situations and as a reaction to particular ‘pressures’ that I felt. For instance, I often downplayed the amount of time I spent conducting research. in order to show that I easily ‘fitted’ my PhD work around raising a young baby, and fulfilling my ‘duties’ as a mother. Interviewees often commented

that my job must fit in well with having a baby, as I did not have to go out to work everyday and could work around his needs. Not only in my responses to the interviewees, but in the way I represented myself more generally, I was conscious of the way in which I masked over the pressures which combining a PhD and raising a child on my own inevitably entailed, representing the fact that I felt torn in conflicting directions. As a single mother, the decision to work was not one of choice alone, but, as for many other mothers, one of necessity. However, being highly career motivated, as I am, I think that playing down the amount of work that I was doing made me feel less ‘selfish’ and that I was being a ‘good mother’, in terms of my own, and more general societal, expectations despite the fact that, whilst I might have been in the house all day to look after Duncan, I was often exhausted as a result of getting up to start work at 3am!

4.3.2 Crofting and the domestic ideal

For women who were crofting prior to when it became common for crofting women to ‘go out’ to work, from about the 1960s (Mewett, 1977), crofting is firmly interpreted within a dominant domestic discourse. Their family and domestic responsibilities are presented as ‘coming first’, and they suggest there was little conflict in combining this and croftwork. They define themselves as mothers and ‘housewives’ and rarely as farmer, or crofter (see Alston, 1995), although some respondents said they would use this term in addition to ‘housewife’.

I’d say [I was] a housewife because that is what was my kind main department! (Christina)

I'd call mesel' a hoosewife, and a crofter...hoosewife-crofter (Babsie)

**Me midder wis joost a hoosewife. Wrought da croft whin me faeder wis
awa (JD, SA3/1/5)**

Women's accounts of their lives in crofting also reveals an adherence to a set of values about 'women's work', which are framed within this domestic discourse. That the domestic angel provides an ideal *to live up to*, as opposed to simply providing a reflection of women's experiences, is evident from those accounts which reveal that there could be real conflict in combining croft-work, knitting, housework and raising a family. During interviews, respondents 'mask' this conflict due to their desire not to 'step outside the cultural stereotypes of 'normal' women' (Billington, et al., 1991 p.126). Keating & Little state 'Women's domestic role is seen as a basic element of rural life' (1994 p.271) and a degree of agency is evident in women's constructions of their lives in relation to this ideal. In some cases there was a real conflict between women's crofting and domestic work.

**She wid sit – she didna want da neeboors ta see hit – and she wid sit up
till two o'clock in da morning ta git...usually haps, and she wid sit up ta
git dis feenished. And she wid pit up dis black cloth so da neeboors
didna see dat she hed ta sit up ta git dis feenished...She wis proud and
strict! (JH,SA3/1/10)**

**Shu didna hae dat much ta dae wi da bairns fir shu did da ootside wark
an left me an mam [grandmother] wi da ins. She wisna very keen on da
inside wark avaa she wis mair fir da ootside (JG,SA3/1/6)**

Another respondent describes a household division in which her mother, and one of her aunts, worked outside whilst her other aunt assumed the domestic role and looked after her sister's children. After working on the croft her mother and aunt would

**come in the same as the menfolk and sit down and have their meal in
peace and the household woman [the third aunt] would serve**

(PH,SA3/2/111/2)

The 'extended' family was common in Shetland. A couple, upon marriage, commonly lived with the in-laws of either the husband or wife. Various other arrangements were also common, such as a sister or brother remaining with their sibling after marriage. A pattern of unmarried siblings cohabiting was also common. Oral accounts reveal that this extended family pattern was common up until about the World War II. None of the younger women in the sample lived in an extended family arrangement.

A linguistic relic of the labours of crofting women lingers in the dialect word *cockramin* (cock-crow meat), which referred to the tea and oatcakes eaten by women in the early hours of the morning after they had been sitting up all night spinning and carding (Hunter, 1985). These accounts suggest that combining croft work, knitting and domestic work could be highly problematic and, in some cases, could be resolved by relegating the primary domestic role to a specific female relative. One respondent recalls an accident which occurred whilst she was doing croft work, which forced her to clearly acknowledge the implications of combining croft work and child-rearing.

**I'd left the two older ones looking after Roderick, who was a year and a
half. And I'd just puttin on the dinner and left it, and the laddy was**

playing around and he pulled the pot of boiling tatties on top of him – he was just scalded...It was my blame...I left the bairns – if I had've been there it probably wouldna have happened (Libby)

Another states,

I suppose lookin' back it likely was too much! You think you cram in this, and you think after...I maybe should've paid more attention to different things...I kind of sometimes think that I maybe should've gien more time to me family but at the same time they maybe learn...(Christina)

Billington et al. suggest that 'women's culture does not appear to incorporate the fact that most women spend much of their lives in paid labour, as well as domestic labour' (1991 p.135). A clear example of this is provided by Pollert's (1981) research into tobacco factory workers who defined themselves as full time wives and mothers, despite the fact that they were working full time. They, like the older women in this research project, stressed their domestic identity of that over their identity as workers.

Within a 'domestic angel' discourse, the primary role of women is to fulfil family and domestic responsibilities. For women who were crofting prior to the 1960s, a strong adherence to this discourse is clearly evident in the negative connotations they attach to the idea of women working 'outside' the home. This attitude was not unique to Shetland, and the prevailing discourse against married women working outside the home is evident in other crofting areas (e.g: Mewett, 1977). One woman, recalling her mother's experience in the 1930s states that it was a

**favour for a married woman to get a teaching job, because da theory wis
dat dey were takin da bread oot o' da mouths o' single women
(SS,SA3/1/27)**

The persistence of negative attitudes towards married women working outside the home is evident in Shetland in the 1970s, when 'work for women', as a result of the oil boom, was identified as being a central cause in family strain (Johnson, 1985). Older women's attitudes towards child rearing and women's participation in employment 'outside' the home are apparent in the following interview extracts.

**I dinna ken why she'd've haed bairns if she was going to work a' the
time...I aye enjoyed the bairns, I'd niver have left them lik dat (Mary)**

**I was just content to look after the family. It's a different wye noo with
all this women going oot to work (Inga)**

**I couldna have gone fae home. I was married. Margaret was born before
I got the post office so I couldna have taken any other job (Ruby)**

**Women didna go oot to work so much then. When the bairns were
peerie I liked being at home with them...I suppose den-a-days you were
supposed maybe just to work aboot and den marry (Christina)**

For the older women in the sample, the 'value' of a job outside the home is valued negatively in comparison to their roles as wives and mothers. One respondent describes getting married to raise children as her 'ultimate ambition' and was content to forego a potential career in journalism in order to achieve it⁷. For these women, there is a very clear distinction between their roles as wives and mothers,

and ‘workers’, in terms of outside employment. For them, the two did not mix, and they see women’s place as firmly in the domestic sphere, particularly when children are involved. It should be noted that, even if these older respondents *had* wanted to work outside the home, the employment opportunities for women were extremely limited. A brief examination of the local press, from the 1930s and 1940s, reveals that the vast majority of jobs advertised were in domestic service, with occasional posts for shop assistants or nurses. From the 1940s onwards there is an increase in the amount of adverts for shop assistants.

There were no jobs here when I was young. You maybe could’ve gone in for nursing, but I didna fancy that! There were just so few jobs that you had to go to service (Bessie)

Dey wirna much wark, dey wir nae wark doon here efter da war (MA, SA3/1/1)

When I left the school I thought well, all the work at this lasses do is they work in hotels, or they go to the guttin’. Well, the guttin’ I didnae fancy, spending the cold, dark days guttin’, or the hotels either...and so I bade and I wrought and helpit them [grandparents] on the croft every way that I could (Matty)

I suppose you just did go and do housekeeping or something (Christina)

It is also possible that job opportunities for women from crofting townships were even more restricted than for women in Shetland generally. One woman recalled that jobs in Lerwick shops or post offices were normally reserved ‘oot a snobbery’ for the Lerwick lasses (Renwanz, 1981 p.208). This type of distinction between

Lerwick and ‘country’ people is evident from the accounts of some of my interviewees and one respondent recalls feeling ‘shabby’ when visiting Lerwick and recalls,

When you’d go to Lerwick, yeah, some of the shops had some lovely outfits – or you’d see them in the catalogues. But you couldna afford them – maybe the lasses that worked in the shops would have this kind of stuff, but we couldna have afforded it. We’d maybe try and mak whit we could (Babsie)

In addition, being a married woman with a home and croft effectively limited job opportunities further. One woman recalls her experience of herring gutting in Lerwick in the late 1930s.

It was mostly unmarried women. But of course that was the country women coming in, but there were a lot of married women belonging to Lerwick who would come and get jobs at the station...there weren’t many country women that came in for you see you had to leave your own home. And go and stay in huts at the station. So you were away fae about the first of June till the end of August, that you stayed in Lerwick. So it was mostly single women and younger people (Bessie)

The potentials for women to interpret their lives in crofting within a domestic discourse are inherent within the type of croft work women were doing.

Physically, the croft was an extension of the house. Croft amalgamation was not common in Shetland until after the World War II and so the croft was considered as an attachment of the home. Thus, to participate in croft work did not involve a complete separation from the home environment. In temporal terms, too, croft work, for much of the time, did not require an absolute separation from their

home. A significant amount of the work could be organised on a ‘piece-meal’ basis, and could be combined with housework and child-rearing. At a practical and symbolic level many aspects of ‘croft’ work represented an overlap *with* housework, or domestic work, such as milking the cow and then churning the milk. The point at which housework stops and croft-work starts is not always easily definable. Croft work is distinguishable from paid employment and some descriptions assign a value of ‘real’ work to paid employment outside the home (see below).

**I never got out to work. I had to stay in at home and look after her
[grandmother] so I was just confined right just to the croft all the time,
helping my mother and my grandmother, so I never knew what it was to
work till after my daughter grew up and I went out to work**

(NP,SA3/1/237)

Their role as mothers could also be combined with croft work as the children could be cared for, and at a later stage participate in, many aspects of croft work.

I plunked him [son] in a pram in the field while I built a little hay stack

(Stella)

They [children] came wi’ wis – they just aye came to wir work wi’ wis.

Took them to the hill working peats and a’ (Inga)

The same pattern is true in women’s knitting. The economic importance of knitting cannot be overstated. Oral accounts reveal that it was vital to a family’s survival, and post the World War II, with the decline in fishing, knitting became the most important secondary occupation (Heineberg, 1973). As with crofting, knitting occurred primarily in the home and was characterised by the same degree

of flexibility. Nicolson refers to the fact that girls were expected to devote a large part of their 'free time' to knitting (1985 p. 155), reflecting a conceptual blurring between leisure and work time. This is evident from some older women's accounts who do not clearly define knitting as 'work' in the same way as paid employment outside the home.

Sometimes [when you knitted] it wis joost whit you wid say...relaxation.

**At da end o da dey you wid maebe tak your knittin a peerie start (MD,
SA3/1/3)**

There was nae work, there was knitting (Peggy)

**I didnae do *real* work, but we would do knitting. Every week we'd walk
the seven miles to Lerwick and back, my aunts and I, to sell the knitting.**

And I never had a pay-packet in my whole life (Matty)

Like crofting, knitting was not paid for in terms of cash, in the same way that paid employment would have been. The dominant system, which persisted to after the World War II, was that of 'barter-truck'. The system was designed to ensure the best deal for the merchants, whilst denying women the freedom to spend their money as they wished. In this system, women would take their knitting to the shop, sometimes involving walking a considerable distance, and on arrival they would be 'paid'. The payment was, effectively, 'in kind' however. Money was laid on the counter and women would then get goods to that value from the shop. Oral accounts reveal that if they wanted to take the money, they either received less in terms of 'cash value' for their knitting than they would in terms of goods, or that they would either be denied the opportunity to take their money, and/ or

would not be allowed to deal with that merchant in the future. Whilst inherently unfair, the majority of women in the sample were not anti the barter-truck system, as they stated that they bartered their knitting for, mainly, food and sometimes larger items such as clothing, and that they would not have used money to buy anything else.

Thus, in spatial, temporal and economic terms, crofting and knitting were able to be interpreted favourably within a dominant domestic discourse in ways in which outside paid employment could not be. The extended family structure, was a further element in women's ability to meet the domestic ideal, as child-care arrangements were on an informal basis with relatives. Women did not have to negotiate their roles as mothers and workers in the same way that utilisation of formal childcare provision demands. A number of respondents revealed the significance of 'paying' for formal child minding arrangements and the fact that this was either not considered, or would not have been an acceptable option in the way that informal family arrangements were.

You certainly wouldna have paid a minder. It just wasna the done thing – I think folk never realised that they could. If you had a family you just looked after your family – you didna leave it wi' onybody else. If your parents would keep the bairn well that was fair enough, you used to go off on holiday and leave your bairns, and you didna think that was unusual...But that wasna a case of *paying* someone to look after them – that never goed on (Libby)

His parents helpit looking after as lang as they were able...but it wis just, ken, here and there, no lik ony definite arrangement or that (Inga)

Oral accounts revealed a distinction between ‘paying for’ childcare and participating in more informal arrangements, usually with other relatives. At the time of fieldwork I was trying to arrange child-care arrangements for my son. A relative, Josie, very kindly offered to look after him on an informal basis for one full day and two afternoons a week whilst I worked, and I was far more comfortable with that arrangement than I was with the idea of ‘employing’ a child-minder. Part of the reason for this was because I was very grateful for the flexibility that it afforded, but I really liked the idea that the relationship between Josie and Duncan would be based on something more than remunerative return (and, despite my best efforts, Josie point blank refused any payment). Again, I think it allowed me to fulfil my ambiguously self-prescribed role as an almost-stay-at-home mum! I also felt some pressure from my mother to avoid placing Duncan in formalised day care, who thought that it would be far preferable for him to be with a relative. A number of interviewees reflected this view and intimated to me that having a relative look after my son, who was ‘like a granny’, was far preferable to paying a ‘stranger’ to mind him.

Women’s accounts stress the flexibility of their craft work and knitting, and the fact that they were primarily wives and mothers. This is reflected in the terms they apply to themselves. The majority of older respondents referred to themselves as ‘housewives’, with ‘crofter’ occasionally being employed as a secondary term. Fulfilling their primary role as mothers is presented as their major concern, and they all stress the degree to which their craft work, and knitting, was ‘worked around’ child rearing.

**I think its fine having a croft, you ken...but I suppose I was aye kinda
interested in me family. I would aye put that first, I suppose, deep doon
(Christina)**

I was quite happy being a crofter. A mother first, then a crofter (Lesley)

Another gave up employment as a nurse, after having children, to work a knitting machine,

**It [work] haed to be very much flexible as far as the bairns were
concerned, I worked aroond what their demands wis....you could work
it around the bairns quite well because...I always felt I wis there for
them (Netta)**

The importance of flexible working patterns is evident from women's antipathy towards the introduction of knitting units, from the 1920s onwards, due to the fact that they involved less flexible working patterns (Heineberg, 1973; Black, 1995). One woman describes her working role, which involved doing the majority of croft work, and structures her description within a 'traditional' female narrative.

**I could put the bairns to school in the morning, feed the sheep or
whatever, and I'd be sitting oot yonder on the tractor, nae cab on, fae
early in the morning till the afternoon and be back hame to the farm to
see the bairns coming home, then make dinner, then Stephen would
come hame (Lesley)**

This type of description could be simply taken to reflect the type of 'multi-tasking' that women with families had to do in the past, as they continue to do. However, the interesting fact is that their descriptions are *weighted* in definite favour of their domestic role. With reference to women farmers in Norway, who unusually work with heavy farm machinery, a similar construction of themselves

as 'women' *despite* the 'masculine' nature of the work they do is evident and

Brandth states,

Men may judge women as competent farmers because they are driving machines. But, it is equally important that they present themselves as real women, something which entails what most women do, namely housework...taking responsibility for the housework is an important part of how they construct themselves as women' (1994 p.140).

She also suggests that,

In addition to the masculine work on the farm, which they share, they have their own, separate domains...The machines are their common working domain, but these couples also have clear feminine and masculine arenas in which to consolidate their differences (ibid ,1994 p.143).

Thus, the fact that women participate in aspects of 'masculine' work does not transcend their female roles which are articulated in other areas than agricultural work.

Women's adherence to a dominant domestic discourse is evident from their acceptance of gender divisions of work along 'traditional' male female lines, and the higher value placed on men's work. Phrases such as 'they all mucked in together' tend to mask over the reality of gender divisions and inequalities. As Alston notes 'for farm women, their interdependency with farm men, essential to successful family farming, does not necessarily translate into equality' (1995 pp.23-24). Housework is almost exclusively female (Fryer, 1992) and one respondent, Stella, defines 'women's work' as 'housework'. Another, Lizzie, recalls the strict division of labour between her aunt, who did all housework, and uncle and the fact that her aunt would not eat with the other members of the

family, but would serve food instead. One respondent in Renwanz's research stated that the men 'didn't even throw out the water they washed their face with' (1981 p.293). The division of labour started in childhood, when girls were expected to do domestic work, as well as help outside.

The boys was expected to help ootside. We were for the inside (Peggy)

**It [housework] wasnae expected of the boys, but certainly it was
expected of the lasses to work ootside (Libby)**

**The men! They never did nothin'! They'd come in for their maet when it
wis ready! I never mind my grandfather makkin' a cup o' tae in his life!
(Matty)**

They never did any hoosewark unless it was...a rare thing! (Ina)

Croft work, too, was divided along gender lines. For instance, men slaughtered animals and women milked cattle (Mitchell, 1986). Men cut peats and women raised them (Fenton, 1997).

Women never cut peats. 'At ever I mind (Ina)

**I never saw any sailor man come home and do milking! They came
usually home and maybe helped with the spring work – the digging, and
sowing and that (Bessie)**

**I can never mind a man milking a coo. It was always the women. When
the coo calfed unless they needed brute force, it was always the women
that calfed the coo and the men was excluded (Bertha)**

When he cam hom, the old hoose up yonder the roof had to be tickit, or thatched. That was a big day, I mean, that's men's job, women passed up the straw to them, but that took a whole day to be done. And then if there were any fences to be fixed up, or dykes or whatever, then he had to do all that (Jessie)

Not only were there different roles for men and women, but different values were attached to them (see Wood, 1994). Women's descriptions of the nature of, and reasons for, gender division in croft work are formulated within the domestic discourse which accords a higher value to men's work. For instance, the extract below describes women's work as 'odd jobs', in relation to the work done by men.

It was generally the women that got the...odd jobs. Just raising peats. A man never could raise peats – he'd cut them (Ina)

The ability of women to do men's work is central in the construction of an 'egalitarian' past (see chapter 5), and *doing the same work* is construed as promoting equality between the sexes.

There werena this, what do they call it...whar the women are...equality nowadays...equality was den a days too in a different wye. You were doin' men's work (Ruby)

The higher value placed on men's work than women's work in rural life is recognised elsewhere (e.g: Beale, 1986). One respondent related that women were responsible for lambing and calving, though she knew one man who could do this. She states that he did not want this skill 'publicised' as it was women's work.

The man next door here was quite a nifty hand with lambing sheep, and calving a cow. He just had this natural gift. But he didn't broadcast it...he didn't want it publicised (Stella)

Another woman in her late nineties recalls

**Dere wis definite men and women's work, the men would tink it would
tak them doon tae do a woman's work! Hen's and hoosewark, and da
kye, dat wis women's work. Women did a' the milking o da kye, da men
wouldna dae dat (Jessie)**

Girls, and women, were expected to help outside after working in the house, but boys and men were not expected to help in the house after working outside. A man recalled that when he was growing up after the World War I he was scolded if he tried to milk a cow as only women were allowed to do this (Renwanz, 1981). The following extract from a novel by a local writer reveals the 'inappropriateness' of men doing women's work. 'With a gallantry he hadn't known he possessed, he insisted on carrying Jeannie's bundle. She protested. After all, this was women's work' (Irvine, 1987b). These examples demonstrate that women are equally instrumental in maintaining existing gender divisions in relation to work. The negative values, or inappropriateness, attached to women's work when done by men are the opposite when it is men's work done by women, who are defined as 'honorary men'. One respondent, Matty, described her aunts as ploughing 'just lik da men' and another, Stella, recalled an aunt who could handle a boat 'as good as any man'. An obituary of one woman states that her father referred to her as his 'boy Jeannie' because of her capability to do men's tasks and her 'gutsy' attitude to life (Shetland News, 10th April, 1930).

Division of labour along gender lines went hand in hand with inequalities in decision making processes andcroft 'management', as well as lack of recognition of women's agricultural role in the public sphere. This lack of public recognition and affirmation of women's skills is evident from a review of Agricultural Show

publications, such as the Dunrossness Agricultural Society Show 1926 catalogue of entries. With the exception of the egg classes, women are poorly represented, even in areas such as poultry classes, despite the fact that women were usually responsible for looking after hens. Perhaps this represents the ‘official’ association of men with agricultural work, and a possible reluctance on the part of women to participate in the events and receive public recognition for their agricultural work. The involvement of women at ‘official’ levels in agricultural organisations is poorly represented. For instance, out of twenty-eight members of the Shetland Wool Marketing Board of 1949, which was established to regulate the marketing of wool in Shetland, only one member was a woman.

A duality is evident in terms of decision making processes. The impact of being the person who does the majority of croft work provides that person, often the woman, with the knowledge required to take primary management decisions. One respondent describes this process.

Peter disnae see the sheep in the same light and he disnae recognise them! I ken where quite a lot of them cam fae, their backgrounds and if they’re good lambers or poor lambers and if they had plenty of milk or if they’re no very good at that. So I’m been the one that’s made the decisions about what’s been killed and what’s been kept and what rams we had and when we slipped the rams (Lizzie)

However, in a number of older women’s accounts, the women’s role is presented as passive in decision making processes. Although the woman may be doing the majority of croft work, the terminology used suggests that it is the man who is ultimately responsible for deciding how the croft should be run. Although women could inherit the tenancy of crofts, and many did, it is more often the man who

was the tenant of the croft and this provided him with a particular status. The statements below suggest that the man, as the tenant, had responsibility for croft management, to the extent that it was *his decision* to ‘let’ his wife operate it as she wished on a daily basis.

In an awful lot of cases it is actually the man that’s the tenant, or the owner, of the croft...me dad was the tenant, but he let mam run it as she felt was best. When he ended up inheriting three crofts he said no way, two crofts was more than enough for mam to manage with children to look after (Stella)

He left mam to run the croft in her way coz he was away so much (Netta)

The preference for passing crofts down the male line is expressed in a number of interviews. Two respondents recall their relatives’ crofts being assigned to their husband, and father, respectively, despite the fact that these crofts were primarily worked by women.

[the croft was] really my mother’s croft but the old lady [grandmother] gave it to my father you see, when they were staying with her (LM, SA3/2/120)

When we married, me grandfaither gied the croft to him [her husband] you see (Matty)

Another describes the importance of keeping the croft in the family name, which meant assigning it to a male member of the family and not the respondent’s mother who had worked on it in the absence of the oldest brother.

The year that we came back to the croft Uncle Charlie was home. My father’s name was Peterson but my mother’s name was Manson so they

wanted to keep the croft in the Manson name as it had been for years.

So Uncle Charlie paid Robert the compensation for the house (Bessie)

4.3.3 Crofting's reinterpretation within changing concepts of work and women

The meanings women attach to crofting have shifted in line with shifting dominant discourses of 'women's roles'. Above, it was shown that a shift had occurred from a dominant, and almost exclusive, domestic discourse of women, to one which recognises women's dual roles as mothers/homemakers and paid employees. Whilst women in Shetland continue to stress their domestic roles, and adhere to an unequal value system of men's and women's work, there is a higher degree of gender consciousness and the desire to fulfil working roles in addition to motherhood. 'Crofting' provides the means for women to fulfil a domestic role, that of the part time working mother, whilst letting them define themselves more clearly as paid workers.

Since the 1960s women in crofting areas have increasingly been employed in paid employment (Mewett, 1977), which has predominantly been on a part-time basis. As crofting has reduced in economic importance, this income has become increasingly important. Shetland women are predominantly employed in the 'service sector', in hotels, restaurants, health service, public administration and the Shetland Islands Council (Figure 9, appendix 5). There has been a significant rise in the percentage of women who work, from 27.7% of women of economically active age in 1971, to 52.5% of women of economically active age in 1991 and 64% in 1999 (Figure 10, appendix 6).

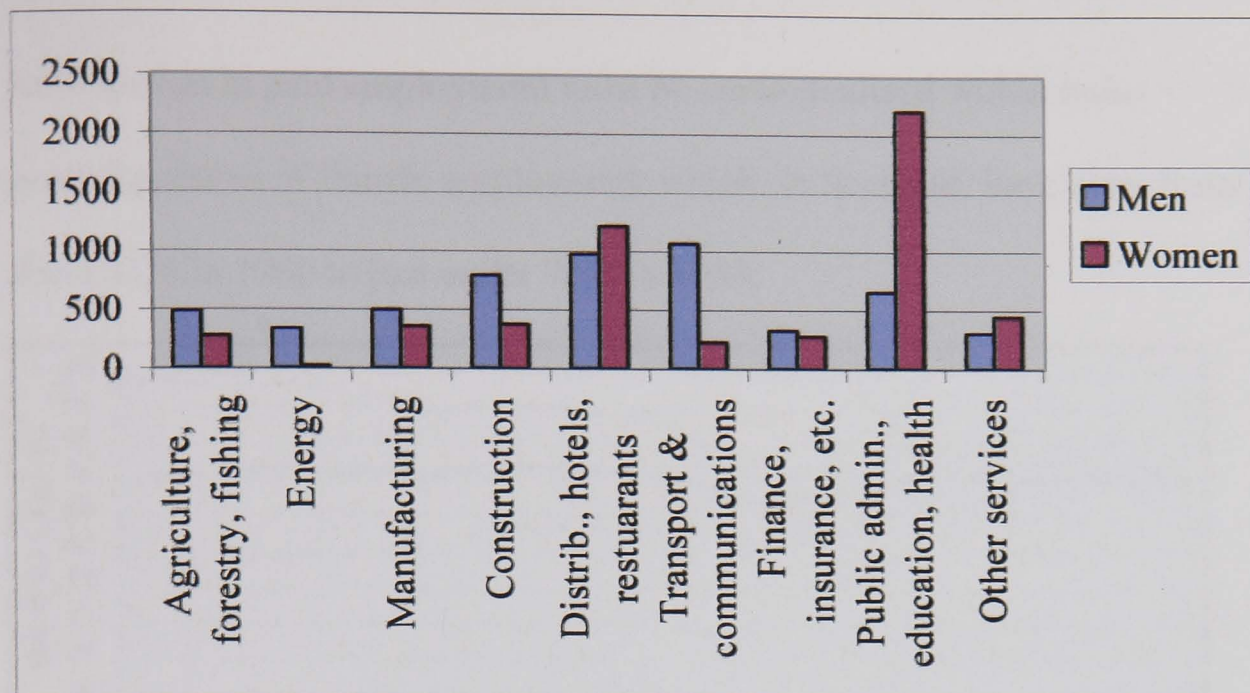


Figure 9: Employment by sector in Shetland with gendered breakdown (statistics source, SIC, 2001)

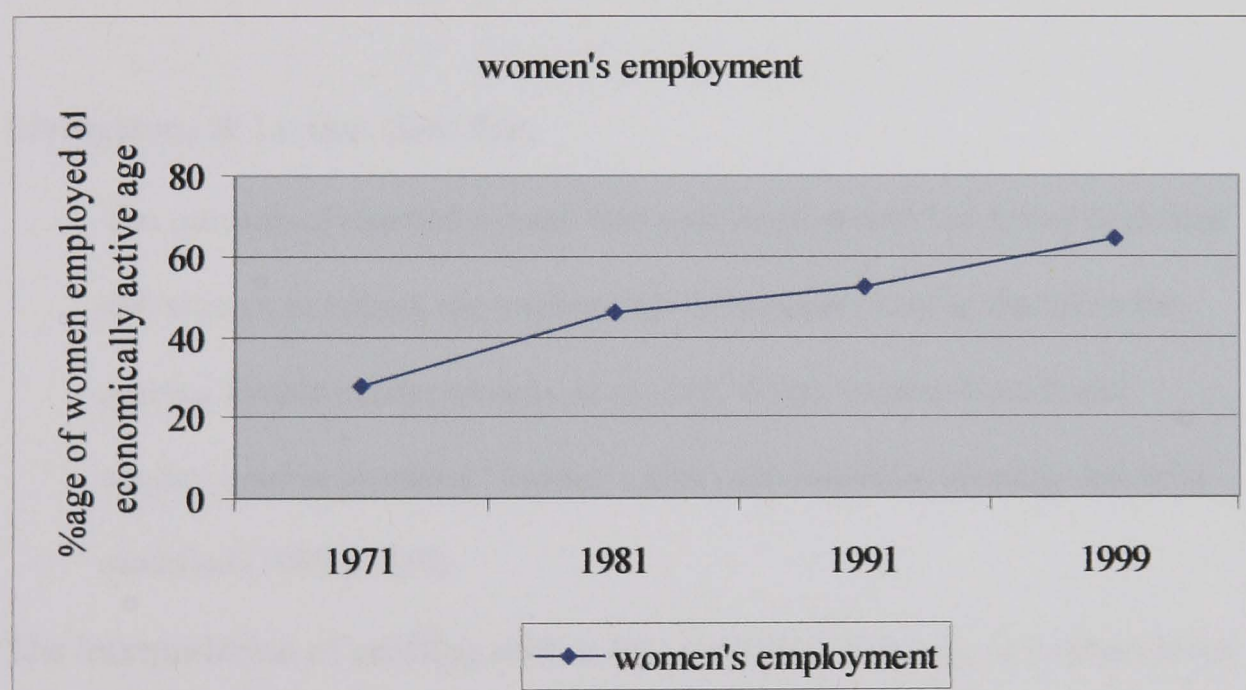


Figure 10: Women's employment trends in Shetland since 1971

This trend is not only true of crofting areas, where falling farm income has increasingly led to the need for women to work (Clark, 1997), but is also in evidence throughout rural Europe (European Commission, 1998). Like women in Shetland, rural women elsewhere in Scotland are over-represented in part-time work (Clark, 1997). Women's increased

participation in paid employment must be contextualised within more general patterns of female employment which, in Scotland, have risen from about 45% in 1960 to just under 70% in 1999.

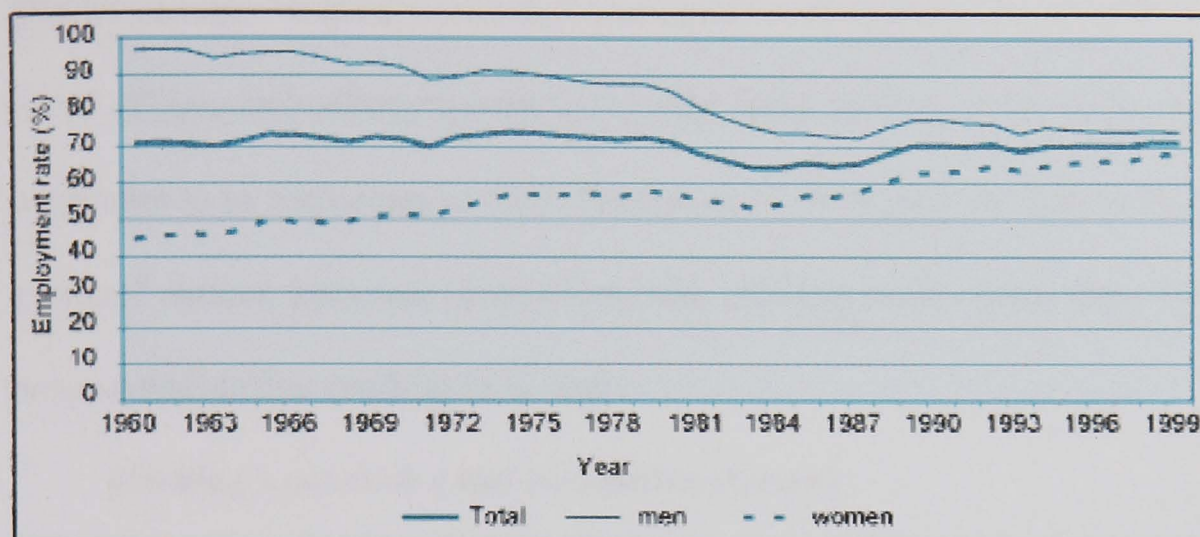


Figure 11: Trends in women's employment in Scotland 1960-1999

Livingstone & Luxton state that,

The infusion of married women into paid employment has forced both men and women to rethink the mother-wife-homemaker role as the taken-for-granted female gender identity in society. Where women have found employment in so-called 'women's jobs', the dominant ideology has been modified (1989 p. 250).

The interpretation of crofting within this modified ideology is evident from statements which interpret crofting as 'work' and legitimise some women's decisions to stay at home and fulfil a 'part time working mother' ideal.

Working part-time is just fine – that's the perfect solution. And its good for the kids...I don't see the point of having kids and shoving them in a nursery long hours all day (Janet)

I felt I was lucky bein' able to do everything...even when I had the café,

**the bairns was still wi' me. And here was the sam – you were still
makkin' a livin' at one thing and the bairns was hom – I was lucky
(Joan)**

Whilst younger women's practical participation in crofting is generally less (in terms of time and effort expended) than the older women in the study, crofting continues to be important in their discourses of work and the family. In fact, some younger women associate themselves with crofting more clearly than the older women and define crofting as a 'job'.

Crofting's not such a bad occupation (Laura)

**I've been working every day fae I married. On the croft here, yeah. And
I have two sons and I worked every day during my pregnancy (Lesley)**

Two respondents clearly present their croft work as fulfilling a working role but allowing them to put their responsibilities as mother first.

**you have to put a baby first I wouldn't work...I don't think its fair to
work full time...I suppose a couple of days a week would be alright. And
there's still the croft (Laura)**

**People must think I'm mad [staying at home to raise her children] but
there's the croft too, and that's really like work (Patti)**

When asked if, as her children get older, she would consider working full time 'outside' one woman stated,

**It depends. How crofting is heading I suppose – I'll still have to help
with the books and that (Louise)**

Earlier in the interview, this woman defines crofting as a 'hobby' which makes no financial contribution, yet she defines it as an important factor in future

employment decisions. A degree of agency is involved in the way that crofting is interpreted to ‘fit the situation’, and to allow this woman to interpret, and present herself as a ‘worker’, even though she defines crofting along non-economical lines elsewhere in the interview.

The change in attitudes towards croft work is reflected in a shift in attitudes towards women’s work in general. One respondent, Netta, referring to her daughter, states

Lynn wis working in a retirement home...She enjoyed that but she kinda lost her nursing because you’re no identified as a nurse and she couldna really use her qualities there (Netta)

This can be contrasted with her own experience, where she gave up nursing, indefinitely, to machine knit in order to look after her children. Another woman suggests that attitudes towards women and work have shifted since the 1960s.

I wrought in Scallowa’ as a teenager – we werena really so ambitious I suppose as what they are noo-a-days. Looking back I think if I’d grown up in this era I might’ve gone south to work (Joan)

Miller & Rose (1995) suggest that work is no longer represented as a constraint, but is constructed as part of the enterprising individual’s search for self-realisation and self-improvement. The above quote clearly shows a move to considering women’s work in terms of a career, as opposed to simply a means of earning money. The changes in attitudes towards work are also reflected in some women’s consciousness of their own domestic contribution in paid employment terms (see Bailey, 2000).

Its just a pity that they dinnae pay the mothers that stay home, I think the government would need to look at that, quite seriously (Patti)

Work ‘outside the home’ continues to be interpreted within dominant value systems which accord a lower value to women’s work. The income derived is generally described as ‘extra’ and accorded less importance than the man’s income.

**Its kinda extra money to buy to buy extra privileges and things like that
(Louise)**

**It was certainly an income that we wouldna have haed, and you could
buy extras. I remember buying things like a table and I thought, that’s
fine (Netta)**

**I suppose we would...manage, but its extra. I mean we would manage
but... (Frances)**

This final quote was from a nurse who worked almost full time, and whose earnings must have been almost equal to her husband’s, but who still described her financial contribution in terms of ‘extra’ income. The emphasis on part-time work perpetuates the idea that women’s work is ‘less important’.

**I suppose I’d rather work as not! But it’s no like working full time at a
proper job or onything (Marjory)**

This woman worked as a cleaner and home help and, in total, her hours approximated thirty-five hours per week, almost equivalent to a full time job, but the ‘piecemeal’ nature of the work meant that she did not regard it as ‘proper’ employment. Other respondents described their decisions in taking particular jobs as the need to fit in with caring for their family, and acknowledged the fact that their employment decisions had not been primarily motivated in terms of career

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I do most of the light work. The heavy work like fencing and that,

Angus does that (Patti)

Younger women's interpretations of their croft work are similar to women in other rural areas. Several studies have noted that the work and contribution of the farm wife has been consistently overlooked and undervalued (Sachs 1983; Gasson, Winter & Shaw, 1992), and this under-valuation is central in women's perceptions of themselves. O'Hara (1997) suggests that since farm women are in the first place wives and any farm work they do is regarded as unpaid, they are relegated to the same category as 'housewives'. Whatmore (1991a) suggests that the farm family is suffused with ideologies of 'wifeness' which legitimise patriarchal labour relations so that women themselves undervalue or discount aspects of their work as not 'proper' work. This has led to a conception of women in farming families (even where they are primary producers) as 'supportive' (Keating and Little, 1994 p.720), or 'helpers', 'wives' and 'daughters' (Rosenfield, 1985). It was suggested above that many women de-emphasise their roles in crofting because they find it hard to attach value to the type of work they are doing, following a process of mechanisation and masculinization of croft work in the twentieth century, and particularly since the World War II. One respondent, Louise, states that her husband does the 'main work...he might do all the drenching and the dipping and that kind of thing'. Clearly, although she spends more time doing croft work on a daily level, her husband's concentrated work is more easily interpreted as work. The dominant discourse that work and home are separate, means that a range of work activities conducted by women do not meet the usual definition of 'labour' (Gasson, 1984, Reimer, 1986, Alston, 1990, Shortall 1992; Leach, 1993). This process of de-valuing, or de-defining women's

work in crofting is coupled with a process of increasing emphasis on women's other roles, as paid workers, for instance.

Women continue to be primarily responsible for housework and child-rearing, and describe men, at the most, as 'helping' in this sphere.

When the family was coming, Peter was working long oors but when he was free he wasnae averse to helping with things. He might no look to see what was needing to be done, but if he was asked he would do it
(Lizzie)

When I cam back, Andrew had just cried and cried because he didna ken whit wis happened – and why mam wisnae there to put him to bed. And David hadnae really a clue whit to do – I don't think he'd ever put the bairns to bed really or done dat! But he wis fine during the day like!
(Marjory)

I do all the housework! But now that I'm taking a bit more [paid employment] on he'll put the tea on or whatever, and if I'm home from work late he'll mind the kids for me **(Janet)**

It was noted in the older women's accounts that strong views were held on the idea of paying for childcare. Older women relied on informal assistance, usually from family members, and took children along whilst doing croft work. That children are still primarily regarded as a woman's responsibility is evident from several younger women's accounts. One respondent states

You feel that if you're going to have children you should really be there for them **(Louise)**

**I couldn't work during the day, I wouldn't even consider having
someone to look after my children (Maria)**

Younger women generally perceive a greater separation between work and child-rearing than was evident in older women's accounts, and less opportunity to easily combine the two, even where the work they are participating in is croft work.

**I do a lot less on the croft since the peeriest one...you canna take him
oot (Louise)**

**I put yokes on jumpers and finishing and that, just a bit to try to spin
oot...because we were trying to save for the hoose...I did that just until
Raymond was born [mid 1970s]. I didnae really have the time after that
(Karen)**

4.3.4 'Introduction' Of Dominant Discourses

Above, it was shown that women's interpretations of crofting had shifted in line with shifting dominant discourses of women, work and the family which were occurring throughout Britain during the twentieth century. The mechanisms by which women may have been aware of non-local discourses, and the impact of communication and technological developments in the introduction of new ideas are explored in this section.

The post-1930 period is particularly salient when discussing the introduction and appropriation of new and dominant discourses, as it witnessed such major communication developments that it inevitably transformed the dissemination of people and ideas. Graham refers to 'the hectic pace of change which has swept Shetland life along in recent years...In many ways the past twenty-five years have

been the most turbulent in Shetland's history' (Graham, J., 1990 p.138). However, it is important to note that pre-1930 Shetland was not as 'closed' a society as has previously been thought (Monkton, 1987; Black, 1995; see chapter 1). Thus post-1930 developments were simply building on existing structures which already incorporated Shetland neatly within the rest of the British Isles.

4.3.4.1 *Communications and mass media*

Fryer (1992) suggests that the continuing progress in communications had the greatest overall impact on island life. The Crofting Counties Scheme, which provided 100% grants for the building and upgrading of existing roads, was responsible for sixty-three miles of class 1 roads between 1935-42 (Nicolson, 1972). This was accompanied by an increase in the number of small vehicles in the islands, from about a dozen cars pre-the World War I, to 1, 146 by 1938 (ibid, 1972). Ferry services, which carried mail and national newspapers, similarly improved and Shetland had three runs per week to mainland Scotland in the summer and two runs per week in the winter. A regular air service between Shetland and Aberdeen, via Orkney, was established in 1936 which ran three return flights a day until the outbreak of the World War II. Continuing inter-island, as well as outer-island, transport developments have occurred throughout the twentieth century, including increased and improved inter-island ferry services, and the connection of some islands such as Trondra and Burra to the mainland of Shetland by bridge.

During the World War II, postal deliveries were increased to two per day and Fryer (1992) suggests that this regularity of the postal service boosted trade and

led to the expansion of mail order firms. Steady progress in the expansion of the telephone and telegraph network, and the establishment of radio telephone links with the islands of Out Skerries, Papa Stour and Foula occurred in the 1930s, although it was not until after the World War II that Shetland was fully incorporated into the national telephone circuit (Fryer, 1992).

In addition to the local papers, the *Shetland Times* and the *Shetland News*, daily British newspapers were available after the World War II.

**We knew a graet loc aboot da ootside world fir dey wir dat mony paper
ta'en in, fir iverybody wis a reeder, we wir moast aafil reeders – da
hale Isle raed (JG,SA3/1/6)**

A survey of the local papers of the time, which were the most widely read in Shetland, reveals an adherence and dissemination of 'traditional' female values, with an emphasis on beauty, childcare and domestic abilities. The *Shetland News* ran a 'women's realm' section, which continued into the 1940s, with articles on jewellery, recipes, skin lotion and child care. The *Shetland Times* ran a similar section with articles on cookery and health. Newspaper adverts reiterated the 'traditional' female values relating to femininity and beauty, such as an advert in the 1930 *Shetland News* for Beecham's pills 'women's best help to health and beauty'. Oral accounts reveal the popularity of the *Women's Weekly* and *Women's Realm* magazines amongst older women, and magazines such as *Women's Own* amongst younger respondents. Referring to these kinds of 'traditional' women's magazines, Caldas-Coulthard states

the topics without exception situate women either in the domestic sphere or in close proximity to it. The concept of femininity offered is bound to family ideals of affection, loyalty and obligation and domestic production or

housekeeping (1996, p.253).

The introduction of radio in 1923-4 had a major influence in the dissemination of dominant discourses, which Bruley (1999) suggests promoted an image of domestic womanhood from 1922 onwards. One respondent describes the impact of the radio in a remote location

She [her aunt] listened to the radio and she could tell you so much about what was going on in the world...Yet locally, she was just...to end up wi' she never left the croft, I'd question if she'd been off the croft in the last thirty years (Lizzie)

Television arrived in Shetland in 1964, and is identified by Monkton (1987) as more far reaching than anything else that has occurred in Shetland, including oil. Wood (1994) suggests that of the many influences on how we view men and women, media are the most pervasive and one of the most powerful. He suggests that media reproduces cultural views of gender in individuals, defines 'normal' women, men and relationships and under-represents women. Referring to media portrayals of women Wood states 'a woman may be strong and successful if, and only if, she also exemplifies traditional stereotypes of femininity' (1994 p.185).

4.3.4.2 *Emigration and immigration*

Continuing emigration from Shetland was a feature of the earlier twentieth century, although not on the same scale as other parts of the Highlands and Islands. There was a general move from Shetland from country areas to Lerwick due to the centralisation of industry and services in Lerwick (O'Dell 1939). By 1931 the population of 21,322 represented only 76.5% of the 1901 total and this population was lost from areas outside Lerwick (Steele, 1992). Prior to the World

War I, women were a relatively immobile group compared to men (Black, 1995), but they began to migrate in increasing numbers in the inter-war period (Jamieson, 1949; Barclay, 1954; Coull, 1966). Although their movements are extremely difficult to trace, it appears that single women most commonly moved to the Scottish mainland (Black, 1995). The majority moved to work in domestic service, with some later forced to return home to look after elderly relatives (Thomson, 1983).

I went away to London and worked in a house after that. I didna just stay that awful long in London, just maybe a year, and then mum wanted me to come back and I worked in a house in Scallowa, she was aye keen on me to come back again!...so I came back. And ken, maybe I had mixed feelings – maybe thought I should’ve stayed away. But...it was fine’ (Christina)

I niver could win [south, to go to service], da folk wis coming up in years den. I wanted ta go bit I couldna win (MF,SA3/1/150)

You couldn’t leave them [mother and grandmother] could you? I would have been very hard hearted then, you couldn’t leave your granny and...(NP,SA3/1/237)

Mrs McFarlane asked if I’d go to Malta. But I said no, that was too far away and my father wasna very well, so I’d have to be there to get in touch with to go home when I wis needed (Bessie)

By the end of the 1960s, Shetland had almost full employment. Labour began to be imported from the Scottish mainland to fill positions in fish factories and on crofts and the importation of native Shetlanders back to Shetland was ‘actively

encouraged' (Zetland County Council, 1973 p.4). Black (1995) notes that oil related activity involved the importation of, at its peak, over 7000 construction workers to Sullom Voe, although the majority of them saw nothing of Shetland (Johnson, 1985). During the 1970s, the influx of people consisted mainly of young families and the number of people in their twenties increased by almost 60% and in their thirties by 85% (Graham, J., 1990). These effects were felt particularly in some areas, and in Brae, in 1982, the proportion of Shetland-born children in the secondary school was only 36% (Johnson, 1985). By 1981 the population had risen to 23, 130 which represents a 34% increase in 15 years (SIC, 1987). Significantly these official numbers do not reflect the approximately 7000 mostly male workers who laboured mainly on building the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal during the construction phase of oil. These workers were classified as being temporary residents (Black, 1995). In the last fifteen years there have been new patterns of immigration to Shetland (Church, 1990). Shetland has kept a fairly expansive, albeit shaky, economy and while population growth has levelled off, there is still a fair amount of population mobility of slightly more in-migrants than out-migrants (Church, 1990).

4.3.4.3 *Government / social welfare*

In the earlier part of the twentieth century, the church was a primary arena for the dissemination of dominant discourses of women. Although its influence in Shetland has diminished and Brian Smith (1987) suggests that people increasingly looked to the state, and not the church, for welfare provision and guidance, for many older women in the sample, religious practice was an integral part of their lives. Both the evangelical movement (Brown, C., 1997) and the Church of

Scotland (Boyd, 1980) emphasised women's role in the home and family. Several accounts from older respondents recall the centrality of the church in their lives.

There was more focus on the church- and we felt that we had to go, it wis a place that we guid. We guid to Sunday school, we also guid to the service...The Guilds, that wis just the women, did charity work – they'd fund raise for maybe some children's hom or other...(Netta)

We went to church on Sunday and now there hardly anybody that goes to church. Our church was the UF church and I've seen that church packed – the big boys were sat on the windows to make room for the older folk to sit on the seats...you wouldna do any croft work – you had to put out and in the cows, but no hoeing or dellin or that, no (Bessie)

The church was very important in den-a-days. There were two services at both the churches, Methodist and Church of Scotland, and there was Sunday School. There was no work done on a Sunday, no washing even – you'd never see a line out' (Mary)

The influence of the church has gradually diminished throughout the twentieth century, with lower attendances throughout Shetland (Sutherland, 1985) a process which had begun prior to 1930. A Church of Scotland survey in the 1940s described ecclesiastical affairs in Shetland as 'discreditable and desperate: dilapidated churches, chronic understaffing, small attendances' (noted in Smith, B. 1987).

This process of centralisation and increasing government intervention drew Shetland into wider modes of ideals. Shetlanders were subject to the same kind of

schooling, the same health concerns and the same centralised morality, as other areas in the British Isles. Central government initiatives between the two world wars was the main thrust for change in Shetland's housing conditions. Increasing intervention in schooling and health, and the recognition in the early twentieth century that education should also be responsible for physical and social well-being (Graham, J., 1998), was a further means by which 'outside' values were introduced. These 'outside' values and practices were perceived in both positive and negative ways, as demonstrated below. Wills (2001) suggests that economic factors are inseparable from ideological ones. She suggests that what was occurring in Britain in the 1920s was the ideological construction of domestic space, through the regulation of health, hygiene, personal cleanliness, nutrition and housing. She suggests that the growth of the culture of modernity was inseparable from a re-evaluation of everyday lives (Wills, 2001). A new bureaucracy of medical officers and school health visitors came into being, while teachers were now required to check heads routinely for lice and report on children walking barefoot to school (Devine, 1999). Department of Agriculture grants, in addition to the more long standing loans, which were first introduced in 1912, for the construction of croft houses were first made available in 1948 (Hunter, 1991). In 1930, Taylor (1930) describes a noticeable improvement in housing of crofters in Shetland, in contrast to cottars' houses. Even in rural areas, basic amenities like water, electricity and roads, taken for granted everywhere else in Britain, were gradually installed. Fryer states, 'In short Shetland continued to develop into a modern society in line with other Highland and Island regions' (1992 p.152). Alexander (1994) suggests that poverty surveys and those responsible for welfare legislation had a narrow conception of domestic life. She

states that ‘home’, in the minds of the British reformers and legislators, was the site of domestic comfort and maternal welfare (ibid, 1994). The experience of Shetland boys and girls at school reveals a marked gender division along very ‘traditional’ male-female lines. For instance, a pupil who attended Fair Isle school from 1916-25 refers to the fact that only boys were given practical lessons in crop growing (Fair Isle School, 1978). Elsewhere in Shetland the girls were taught needlework and domestic economy and the boys were given lessons in agriculture (Stewart-Fraser, 1973). One respondent recalls that at school, in the earlier twentieth century, the girls played inside the wall and the boys played outside the wall in the playhour. The process which has occurred throughout Shetland is explored with reference to Burra, a Shetland island, by Byron (1980) who demonstrates a series of interconnections, in terms of social welfare, communication, emigration, immigration and economic interaction between Burra and the rest of Britain.

4.4 Is crofting still important?

4.4.1 Introduction

Above, crofting is identified as a fluid concept, given its capacity for reinterpretation by women in relation to their changing participation in crofting, the changing socio-economic role of the croft, and women’s appropriation of shifting dominant discourses of women, work and family. Given this fluidity, the lessening importance of crofting in financial/survival terms and the marginalization of women from many significant aspects of croft work, it is important to address whether crofting is still important to women in Shetland. Above, the mechanisms by which competing discourses and ‘new ways of doing

things' may be introduced were explored. I will show here that, although new ideas have evidently been appropriated, there is not simply a wholesale adoption of 'new' ways in favour of old, but, at times, a rejection of new ideas, and at others a local transformation of them. Although fluid, crofting does continue to be an important defining factor with which women continue to identify with, and explain particular courses of action with reference to, and respondents reveal that the meanings they attach to crofting are not limitless. Crofting women also continue to see crofting as something which defines them, to some extent as 'different' to non-crofting women, although they may closely associate with women in other rural areas. The continuing significance of crofting in women's lives partly depends on the way in which they 'deal with' new ideas and 'outside' influences.

Cohen defines crofting as 'part of what one does in 'being a Whalsayman', in pursuing the ideological charter which is implicit in Whalsay identity' (1979 p.262). In Whalsay the tasks of crofting are not referred to as 'work', as a job would be, but require 'maintenance labour' (ibid, 1979 p.264) in the structuring of social relations and values. 'Croft work is one of the ways in which a Whalsayman makes himself recognisable both to himself and to others as a Whalsayman and as belonging to a particular structural nexus in Whalsay' (ibid, 1979 p.265). The ways in which men and women relate to crofting are clearly different, as revealed by this respondent.

**I've certainly found through people I work with however with the men,
not the women, crofting always gives them something to chat about!**

**Very few women talk about crofting...when I think about M, like she
did a lot of the lambing, but when we got together as a foursome Neil**

and Colin would talk about crofting but Mary, although she was heavily involved with the croft, she never talked about it' (Eleanor)

Similarly, in my search for interviewees, I asked one woman I knew if another woman, with whom she was very friendly, was a crofter. She said no, 'not really' and said that, whilst her friend might have done some croft work she was 'not really into crofting'. When I contacted this woman, it transpired that she, up until recently, had been primarily responsible for running a croft and was very interested in most aspects of croft work. Evidently, she and the first respondent had never really talked about crofting, although they both lived and worked on crofts. At a time when many women are not participating to a high degree in croft 'work', does crofting still have a significant impact in structuring their identity?

4.4.2 Crofting continues to be a significant structuring factor

I suggest that crofting does continue to have a significant role in structuring women's identity because it continues to act as a significant factor to which they refer to during interviews. To some extent, this may reflect that, when telling them about the remit of my project, I told them I wished to explore 'crofting'. However, the interviews were designed to focus more generally on women's experiences of childhood, domestic life and paid employment than 'crofting' specifically. Within more general discussions in these areas, 'crofting' was often drawn upon to explain a particular course of action or point of view. Whilst some 'distortion', in terms of the significance people attach to crofting, may have occurred, hopefully its effects were limited by the conduction of the interviews. The specific ways in which crofting continues to influence younger women's work and family decisions is outlined above. Women drew on crofting as a concept to explain

decisions that they made in various aspects of their lives. In some cases there appeared to be a discrepancy in the importance they attached to crofting as an influential factor in, for instance, determining the type of paid employment they would do, and the economic contribution that crofting made, and the level of their actual participation in croft work. Some of the examples above reveal that women considered crofting to be economically unviable, or a hobby, and yet stated that it influenced their participation in paid employment. Thus, whatever the nature of women's actual physical participation in crofting, at an agricultural level, it continues to exert an influence in their lives as they define their actions in relation to it.

4.4.3 A sense of 'difference'

Crofting continues to make people aware of 'a sense of difference' from people elsewhere, and, in many cases, crofting continues to be entwined with a sense of 'being Shetland'. For some respondents, both older and younger, being a crofter and being Shetland were so closely related as to be inseparable.

I think crofting is just in an awful lot of Shetland folk (Libby)

Crofting's been tough going but it's a way of life. For many Shetlanders.

And we know nothing else, so we just have to carry on (Lesley)

Monkton (1987) suggests that a move has occurred from a sense of individual community identity, to a 'Shetland' identity, and Church (1990) explores 'Shetland's' pre-occupation with its own sense of self-identity. These issues are explored in detail in chapter 4, but here I simply wish to state that Shetland women, and men, are keen to assert their 'difference' from people in other parts of

Britain. The quotation above that crofting is just *in* Shetland folk, displays its fundamental importance as a cultural characteristic.

4.4.4 Appropriation, rejection and transformation of 'outside' discourses

Above, I identified a process of increasing incorporation of Shetland into the framework of the British Isles. The church, and then the state, the influx of people and migration of women from Shetland, and the mass media were all means by which Shetlanders were aware of 'outside' ideas. Here, I will address the limitations in certain respects of dissemination of ideas, and in terms of social barriers, and then go on to assess the ways in which Shetland women appropriated 'outside' discourses with reference to 'local' values and conditions.

The effects of the introduction of new people on changing the way of life of local women is identified by Renwanz (1981). One of her informants referred to 'losing wir identity' due to mixing with south folk (ibid, 1981). The increase in women drinking and the rise of materialistic desires in young women was also linked to 'incomer' women (ibid, 1981). However, certain barriers towards the appropriation of new ideas and lifestyles, which may take the form of some kind of resistance, are evident. For instance, Renwanz (1981) outlines the open animosity of local Shetland women to the establishment of a playgroup, and their assertion that women should not have children if they were not prepared to look after them. Instead of adopting the incomer women's methods of organised child-care, the establishment of the playgroup provided local women with an opportunity to assert their own values and openly contrast these with the incomer women. A similar resistance, in terms of non-participation, is evident from the

fact that few local women joined the National Housewives Register which was established in Brae and Mossbank, and was attended by few local women (Jerman, 1981). The National Housewives Register (called the National Women's Register since 1987) was established in Britain in the 1960s and was a relatively progressive organisation. Its current remit, as stated on the NWR web site, is to 'stimulate discussions on a wide range of topics of a non-domestic nature'. The original NHR had a similar remit, and the advertisements and minutes from NHR meetings in Shetland, as published in the local press, reveal that topics including topics such as 'cures for pre-menstrual tension' were discussed, in contrast with the more 'traditional', 'domestic' focus of the Scottish Women's Rural Institute meetings.

A debate in Alting on whether Shetland was the last bastion of male chauvinism provides a clear example of Shetland women's assertion of their own values. 'Shetland women feel they have been treated fairly. They don't feel hard done by. Moreover, they don't need *soothmoother*s to come in and tell them that they're being discriminated against' (quote in Renwanz, 1981 p.292-3). Shetland women reacted against the assertion that Up Helly Aa was a male institution, noting the importance of the behind-the-scenes work done by women (ibid, 1981). Similar attitudes were noted by Brown, C. (1997). This is a clear example of maintaining the importance of their *own* value of work, and women's role, and the fact that these values may become even more important in the face of the introduction of new ideas. Livingstone & Luxton (1989) note that, although women's material condition may be dictated by men and of benefit to men, the internal workings and meanings of women's culture may be only partially understood by

men. The same holds true of both men and women from different cultures, and highlights the importance of exploring women's own subjectivities. Withrington states, 'Shetlanders have adapted where necessary to the incomers but they have also often assimilated them' (1983 p.7). The fact that many of the incomers respected Shetland's 'traditions' and culture (Wills, 1991), and were involved in its revival, was an influential factor in easing this process of assimilation. One respondent, who came to Shetland as an adult and married a Shetlander, displays her commitment to Shetland's culture and the extent to which she defines herself as a Shetlander.

**I suppose I am a Shetlander noo...I've given everything to the museum,
to help Shetland's culture, tradition...(Lesley)**

Perhaps the physical influx of people with a potentially contrasting set of values, at a time when people in Shetland felt a real threat to their 'culture' in the face of the changes brought about by oil (chapter 4) is easier to assert oneself against than the insidious stream of media and consumer impacts. That new ideas have clearly been appropriated regarding women's 'lifestyles' is evident from the interviews.

As Cooper notes,

Consumerism is as buoyant here [Highlands and Islands] as it is in the south. Indeed the region has in the last quarter of a century taken on a pronounced urban aspect. It's been a material revolution centred, the cynic might say, on the television set firmly anchored in every sitting room from Vatersay in the west to the ultimate croft on Unst (1990 p.40).

This process was well underway in the 1950s, as one respondent states

**When we cam here, it was frowned upon bringing up a family with nae
modern facilities (Stella)**

Hunter states,

Crofting families of the 1920s and 1930s...were much better placed, in practically every way, than were their nineteenth-century predecessors. But that very state of affairs...naturally helped to make crofters much less inward-looking, more inclined to make comparisons between their own position and that of people living in other parts of Britain (1991 p.36).

This inward-looking element is evident from the following example, in which a Shetland crofter compares housing conditions in Shetland to those elsewhere. In a letter to the Shetland Times, he states that with the amount of attention being devoted to housing conditions by the Ministry of Health that

Shetland in that respect is well astern, usually three persons to each room, in two cases here six, only one house in 170 or more with a bath; usual rooms, two downstairs and two much smaller up, about 8 x 12feet floor, most of the walls sloping ceiling, small windows, etc., etc. (Shetland Times, 2nd February, 1935).

It must be noted, in the arena of /social intervention, that even where there was local opposition, real changes were put in place. For instance, Fryer (1992) notes that although there was local opposition to water closets, their provision went ahead anyway.

Stebbing states

within a rural locality, there are certain specific ideological and structural constraints on women's role perceptions...they operate in a reciprocal relationship with a traditional view of women as being primarily home-centred, nurturant and subordinate to the male breadwinner (1984, p.207).

She suggests that women living in rural localities are isolated by insularity from competing ideologies (ibid, 1987). With reference to women farmers in Norway, who, unusually participate in 'heavy' farm work, Brandth states,

The culture of the farming community with its expectations and standards has not yet let go of them. They adjust to many expectations of the local society when constructing their femininity. From this point of view one might therefore claim that the norms of the 'old' femininity are stronger in the rural district than in the city (Brandth, 1994 p.147).

For some respondents, it was their role as *rural* women that was perceived as important and they identified with a set of rural conditions and values. One states,

I suppose if you had a family on the outskirts of Dunblane on a farm they'd be much the same as us...I mean a rural life is completely different to an inner city life. ...the similarity wouldn't be so far apart
(Patti)

Cohen states,

identity and performance in Whalsay is not evaluated according to any universal criteria. Rather, judgements vary with the structural bases of one's membership of the community...the community creates, contrives and constrains the bases on which its members engage with each other. It is truly the context within which their behaviour is formulated (Cohen 1978a pp. 455-456).

Living appropriately *at the local level* is of fundamental importance when living within a rural locality, and this is important when understanding the impact of 'outside' influences. The fact that 'outside' influences are *transformed* in this way in line with local discourses, as opposed to simply subsuming local values and

conditions, is a key factor in understanding the continuing importance of crofting in women's lives.

Whilst crofting is identified as a fluid concept, reinterpreted in line with changing conditions, the meanings attached to it are not limitless, but have some very strong connotations particularly about 'tradition', 'community' and 'family', which are evident elsewhere in other rural localities (see Stebbing, 1984). During interviews, there was a strong emphasis on describing the community aspects of crofting, and the implications that living in a crofting community had on family life. Respondents stated that there continued to be a greater sense of community in crofting, or rural, areas than elsewhere and that they felt this was important, even though they felt it was demanding on occasion.

I aye feel that it's [Sunday Teas] a service to the community. It is a tie and a lot of work but I still feel its very important. And it's the one thing that we still do reasonably well at. Trying to keep some continuity, something that we do in the community (Netta)

Me and a lass oot the road there, for two or three years, twice a year we've had charity teas...and I mean that really is a good community thing, because the community bakes for it and comes to support it at the same time. Which is very good (Karen)

I think to keep the community together everybody should work together. This is my personal opinion but I think it would be a better world today if folk had more time for others and less for themselves (Lesley)

To live, and be accepted, within a crofting community requires appropriation of these localised discourses concerning women's roles, and during interviews women emphasise their traditional role in the family and community. Several respondents outlined the pressures on them to participate in community events, even where this potentially conflicted with other demands on their time

I would find it quite difficult for there to be something on in the community and not attend. And it would be questioned as to why we weren't there (Frances)

I, similarly, felt under pressure to attend community parties and events, even when I would rather not have. I have a reputation for being quite sociable, but was actually very uncomfortable with the 'community' events, including the Halloween and Christmas parties, that I did go to. Part of this was based on simple misunderstanding. After being in Shetland for a few months, my sister and I went to a Halloween party with our children. Mistakenly, we used this as a chance to get really dressed and made up (not in a formal way, but as one would to go to a 'party') and felt very out of place when we discovered that none of the other adults were dressed up. At these community parties, it was expected that people would contribute, in terms of preparing food, preparing the local hall and cleaning up. In terms of organisation, the work was primarily done by women, although men do help with preparation and, to a lesser degree, clearing up, whilst women assume main responsibility for food preparation. To some extent, I was uncomfortable with the gendered nature of things, although it seemed to work for those involved. Conversely, I was slightly annoyed that I seemed to be discluded from, on one particular occasion, the decision making process (in this case,

choosing presents for the Christmas party in which every other mother with a pre-school child was involved), despite the fact that I had made a concerted effort to participate in the community. I was also given the 'easiest' jobs, such as buying apples for apple ducking, as opposed to being assigned a more complex role such as making sausage rolls. I felt quite excluded, whilst, at the same time, under pressure to 'conform'. I thoroughly enjoyed any 'house parties' that I went to, and the Boxing Day disco, although my drunken behaviour on that occasion did nothing to enhance my reputation⁸. Having decided that I would be leaving Shetland, I stopped attending events that I did not want to go to. Had I planned to stay, I would have continued to participate in such events, partly for Duncan's sake and partly because I think, as the mother of a young child, for whom many of the events are organised, I would have been ostracised had I not done so. Clark (1997) suggests that there are strong social expectations of women in rural communities which require adherence to a set of 'rules', valued by women themselves. She also demonstrates that there are particular social pressures on those groups who do not 'conform', and includes divorcees and single parent in this category (Clark, 1997).

The association of crofting with 'tradition', in terms of agricultural practice, is explored in detail in chapter 6. Crofting also continues to be associated with a 'traditional lifestyle', and several respondents stressed the value of living in a crofting, or at least rural, community over living in an urban environment.

It is important to me that they [children] have been brought up in a country setting rather than a city setting. You can go into Lerwick, or Aberdeen or London and its all provided. I think it's quite easy to go from the country into the city for activities. I mean it's a completely

different way of life. But they canna come oot here and...just basic things (Frances)

I think the kids learn so much fae being in a crofting place, things they miss oot on in the toon (Janet)

Another thing is that there really doesn't seem to be the same class structure here. I'm not saying it doesn't exist, but when you're out you mix with people from every strata, and that's not something you tend to find in a city. I think that's really good (Eleanor)

4.5 Conclusion

The role of crofting has changed dramatically in women's lives since the 1930s. However, whilst the meanings they attach to crofting have shifted, similarities of perception between older and younger women are evident. Crofting continues to be associated with a limited set of meanings, which emphasise women's 'traditional' role in the family and community. Its fluidity as a structuring concept does not equate with it being a *weak* concept. In contrast, it continues to exert a real influence on women's lives. Buckser states,

Groups that embrace modernity...groups whose members are tightly integrated into larger social and cultural networks, must come to terms with the increasing fragmentation and loss of consensus which modernity implies for them. If their ethnic organisations are to endure, they must find a basis for ethnic engagement which does not rest on cultural consensus, common understandings of identity, or shared values. Doing so requires a new conception of the nature of ethnic community, as well as a set of institutional structures which can accommodate it (2000 p.715).

The transformations in the meanings of crofting in women's lives, and the fact that it continues to be important, must be viewed in this way. Shetland is, in no sense, a 'closed' society and although the women interviewed came from a variety of geographical and social backgrounds, with differences in beliefs and values, there was a 'common ground' between them when it came to discussing crofting. It is precisely the fluidity of crofting, at a conceptual level, and its fundamental association with 'traditional' female values that means it continues to play such an important role in women's lives. Crofting must be regarded as one, significant, aspect of women's identity, an identity that draws on several strands. Wodak et al. define individuals as 'hybrids of identity' (1999 p.16) and go on to state that 'constructs of identity are formed depending on context' (1999 p.188). The meanings that women attach to crofting depend on the meanings they attach to other aspects of their lives, but Shetland women's continuing association of themselves with crofting is entwined with a feeling of 'being Shetland', and that crofting is central to Shetland's own sense of self identity. What constitutes this sense of identity is reworked by individuals in relation to their other components of identity and as Fischer notes,

ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation and by each individual...Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic (1986 p.195).

Crofting must be viewed in line with this concept of reinvention and dynamism if its continuing influence on women's lives is to be understood.

1. Kinloch & Dalton (1989) and later Sutherland and Bevan (2001) showed that income derived from crofting activities was low, with considerable dependency on subsidies. They showed that the income earned from non-crofting activities was of considerable importance and was typically far higher than that received from the croft itself (ibid, 1988). They suggested that this pattern is particularly true of Shetland where the opportunities for well paid alternative employment are probably greater than elsewhere (ibid, 1988).
2. The term 'domestic angel' is chosen because the tenets of this discourse, its impact as providing an 'ideal' for women to aspire to, and the basic arguments of this chapter reflect other researchers' work in this field, who adopt this term (e.g: Alexander, 1994; Wood, 1994). The 'domestic angel' discourse stressed women's domestic role, and was predominant in Britain for the majority of the twentieth century (Alexander, 1994).
3. The production value of sheep in Shetland fell from £4.93m in 1996 to £2.12m in 1998, whilst the number of sheep in Shetland rose from 399,162 to 424,312 in the same period (SIC, 1999). Oral accounts revealed that at the time fieldwork commenced, in 1999, Shetland sheep for export were fetching as little as £1 at market, and, for many, there was no market, leading to the culling of many sheep.
4. The *Shetland Times* began circulation in 1873 and today has a circulation of 11, 200 per week in a population of 22, 000. The *Shetland News* was the other popular local newspaper in Shetland which ran from 1885 to 1963.
5. Following the 1955 Crofters Act, any shareholder in a common grazings can apply to the Crofters Commission for an apportionment of land which will provide them with exclusive use of that area of the grazings.
6. Working with sheep tends to be concentrated at particular times of the year. This includes the lambing season which, with the Shetland or cross Shetland breeds that are common in Shetland, is usually concentrated into April and early May. In July – August sheep are clipped, drenched, given any injections and have their feet cut. Much of the sheep clipping is contracted out to shearers using electric clippers. The next major time of year in the sheep calendar is when the sheep are sent to market in October.
7. It should be noted that a 'Marriage Bar' operated in professional/ white collar occupations, in which women lost their rights as workers upon marriage. This

8. I am very concerned that I don't come across as paranoid in this thesis, but it was fairly evident to me that local women and men, particularly those who I had not known before becoming a mother, had a set of preconceptions of me based on my single motherhood. With women, it was simply reflected in a fair degree of exclusion from some of their social circles whilst other 'outsider' women seemed to be accepted far quicker. I received a high degree of 'hassle' from a couple of men who would visit my house late, often drunk, and were constantly asserting that I 'needed a man'. I don't know to what extent this occurred because I was a single mother, or simply because I was single! Having to 'invent' a boyfriend in order to keep them away really made me think about why I was living in such a small community, and reinforced my decision to leave.

Chapter 5

LOCAL HEROES: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SHETLAND CROFTING WOMEN

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will show that Shetland crofting women ‘of the past’ have, in recent years, been celebrated as ‘local heroes’, a powerful discourse that represents a selective reworking of the past and which serves contemporary interests. This idealised version of women’s past participation in crofting is founded in a romanticised epoch of subsistence crofting, a ‘golden age’ in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, a time that has taken on mythological status in modern day Shetland. At the beginning of the project, I anticipated some antipathy from men about my decision to study crofting *women*. However, both men and women were extremely supportive of my decision to conduct research into women’s lives on the basis that they believed that women had single-handedly maintained the crofting economy. The ‘local hero’ discourse provides a powerful image for Shetland and is one that Shetlanders are keen to maintain. The implications of this selective reworking of the past are discussed below.

Shetland crofting women of the past have been reconstructed in popular memory as ‘local heroes’. The word heroes is chosen purposefully as this reconstructed ‘ideal’ is based on Shetland crofting women’s ability to perform ‘masculine’ tasks and operate crofts in the presumed wholesale absence of men. ‘Local hero’ is also the name of a film which portrays the Highlands of Scotland in a romantic, ‘traditional’ light (McCrone, 1992). and, as such, represents an apt term to

describe this discourse. I will show that the development of this ‘idealised’ version of Shetland crofting women’s past is a recent one, which is traceable during the twentieth century. I shall explore the ways in which the past may be manipulated, and selectively remembered, forgotten and exaggerated in order to serve contemporary interests. I will suggest this particular discourse of Shetland crofting women serves to promote the interests of ‘Shetland’ at a ‘nationalistic’ level and that it ignores the experiences of the majority of women who have crofted throughout the twentieth century.

At a superficial level, it would appear that Shetland women’s participation in crofting has been recognised and that they have simply been ‘written into history’ in a way that acknowledges their contribution. However, analysis of the ways in which women refer to this discourse during interviews reveals that its impact is not necessarily positive because the dominance of this discourse effectively negates alternative histories.

This discussion draws upon several sources of evidence. It explores how Shetland women have been represented in ‘popular’ literature, including newspapers, local magazines and popular local histories. The analysis of this type of material reflects the fact that it is primarily produced by, and readily available to, people in Shetland. Like the ‘popular histories’ explored in chapter 1, it provides an insight into values and attitudes that reflect, and reiterate, popular local discourses. The second major source of information explored is ‘official’ documentation, produced within Shetland, including Shetland Islands Council (SIC) policy documents, building on research conducted in this area by Church (1990). These

documents reflect the values, attitudes and the fundamental concerns of many Shetlanders with regard to specific issues, and they were often translated into direct action. In addition to documentary analysis, this analysis relied on interviews with women, and informal conversations with both men and women. Analysis was informed by the concept of ‘ethno-history’, which Smith defines as ‘ethnic members’ memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any more *objective* and dispassionate analysis by professional historians’ (1999 p.16). A brief note must be made about the ‘proliferation of discourse’ (Church, 1990 p.10) *of Shetland*, which is manifested in terms of popular and academic publications on Shetland’s history and culture, as well as ‘rituals’ such as Up-Helly-Aa and local fire festivals (Church, 1990; Brown, C., 1997). This ‘proliferation’ was apparent to me after spending a brief period of time in Shetland. Firstly, in relation to its population size, there is a huge amount of material written material about Shetland¹. Secondly, this material is extremely popular with Shetlanders. In most houses I visited, there were a number of books about Shetland, and the general public are highly aware of aspects of their history. Subscriptions to the magazines *Shetland Life* and the *New Shetlander*, which deal with aspects of Shetland’s culture and history, as well as contemporary issues, are high². All of the women in my interview sample bought the *Shetland Times* and a vast majority subscribed to either *Shetland Life* or the *New Shetlander*, or both. Most Shetlanders who I spoke to knew who their local archivist and archaeologist were and were aware of current archaeological projects, primarily as the result of reading about them in the local press.

An underlying theme in this chapter is the interaction between past and present.

This requires an exploration of my role as researcher. The interview represents the point at which stories of the past are represented, and the way in which the past is presented ultimately draws upon aspects of the contemporary, interactive conversation. The history that is written from the stories that are told to me is one in which I, like the people I am interested in, selectively write and, inevitably, reflects my own concerns and interests. Conducting historical analysis at this level, of multi-layered discourses that connect past with present, requires an exploration of the impact that discourses of ‘the past’ have in the present, and potentially provides a new window on the role of crofting, and women, in the present day.

5.2 Definition of the local hero discourse

Here, I will define the ‘local hero’ discourse, which has three primary characteristics: Shetland women running crofts in the complete absence of men; the hardiness of Shetland women; and the equality, and power, which Shetland women held in society.

5.2.1 Shetland women did all the croftwork in the absence of men

A fundamental tenet of the local hero discourse is that women did all the croftwork whilst men were away at sea (see chapter 1). Statements referring to women’s ability to cope entirely on their own in the absence of men were commonly provided at the start of interviews, or represented initial responses from people in general conversation when I told them about the nature of my research.

The men of course went to sea in the early days and the women did most

of the work (Mary)

The women had to do all the work, oh, yes yes. They really kept things goin' (Ruby)

Its awful fine dat du's lookin' at women, for they did hae a harsh life and had to keep everyting goin' for dere wis nae men (Jessie)

There is a striking homogeneity of statements and a strong adherence to the belief that women participated in all aspects of croft work and that men were very rarely around.

Some recent local histories, as the following extract demonstrates, depict women as working on their own in the complete absence of men, and display other aspects of the 'local hero' discourse.

'Crofter' is an inadequate term for the various roles played by women in Shetland during the past 100 years. Women frequently managed both the family and the crofting, breaking the daily routines only long enough to have their babies (Mitchell, 1987, p.31).

The ways in which directive questioning may be responsible for reiterating the theme of the 'independent woman' is evident from the line of questioning employed in one of Paul Thomson's interviews, which eventually formed the basis for his book, *Living the Fishing* (1983). This extract clearly reveals that the interviewer perceived women as operating independently of men, including being economically independent.

Q: How do you feel that the women were treated, they were left in charge of the croft and they were able to work?

A: Yes

Q: So that economically they were able to be independent?

A: Oh yes, but they were – they were too weak to be like men, there was no – no, there was no distinction between them, but the womenfolk – did the crofting work and the men were away and when the men were at home they – did the housework, they did housework anyhow, some of them

(PR,SA3/2/105/3)

5.2.2 Shetland women were inherently hardy

Shetland women of the past are constantly referred to as being ‘hardy’ during interviews and in informal conversations. They not only had to cope with all aspects of physically demanding croft work and raising families in the absence of men, but they had to do this in an extremely harsh and marginal environment. There was no room for weakness: tenacity and hardiness were the essential qualities for survival. Based on representations of women in Shetland poetry, Rendboe describes Shetland crofting women as ‘tough and indestructible’ (1985 p.4).

A Shetland woman had to be peerie and hardy, just lik the ponies (Bob)

The women really were the beasts of burden. Because they carried in all the crops on their backs and they wheeled out the muck on the fields... they were strong and hardy and the croft women really were beasts of burden (Stella)

Boy, they had to be tough really to cope wi' whit they did (Frances)

5.2.3 Shetland was an egalitarian, or even matriarchal, society

The final tenet of the discourse is that Shetland women had considerably more 'power' than their Scottish counterparts, and are considered as having been equal to men. Shetland's society of the past was believed to be egalitarian, or even matriarchal, as many respondents believed that women held more power than men.

You know, in Shetland, women have always been basically the boss.

They've always owned crofts and they really did all the work, but there was a lot more equality than elsewhere. And I think they were a lot more powerful – it was totally different to elsewhere (Laura)

They all mucked in together then – men and women den wis a' the same, they all got on wi' it (Mimie)

Men and women wis fairly equal den – in fact some say women wis the boss, and she ran the croft (Bessie)

One respondent clearly identifies egalitarianism as a Shetland trait, in contrast to other part of Scotland.

The west coast of Scotland's still a bit...dyed in the wools about women.

They're the chattel belonging to the men – do as you're told. The women can do the dirty work at home but the men goes out and does the arguing. But in Shetland I would say the women maybe has always been a bit more...liberated (Stella)

Other research has revealed a similar adherence to this discourse. For instance, Renwanz (1981) notes that, during a debate in 1978, the Shetlanders contended

that Shetland society, ancient and modern, had been characterised by egalitarian sex roles whereas Scottish society was rampant with sexism.

This image of equality, and the effective power that women wielded within the community is evident from the extract provided below of Graham's (1987) novel 'Shadowed Valley'. The extract below represents a description provided by the local minister of Shetland women,

'I find the Shetland women have a simple quality of enduring which is remarkable. The Shetland men are fearless at sea but irresolute ashore. It is the women who are at the heart of the community, shaping it in their own quiet way' (Graham, J., 1987 p.107).

The power of this discourse of equality is such that it appears to be unquestioningly accepted even by academic researchers. For instance, Fryer (1992) suggests that Shetland was characterised by more egalitarian sex roles than elsewhere, without providing any evidence to substantiate this claim, and proceeds to state that housework was almost exclusively female.

5.3 Deconstructing the myth of the local hero

5.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I wish to show that the 'local hero' discourse of Shetland women of the past represents a contemporary reworking of the past and is, essentially, a 'myth'. I will demonstrate that whilst it is based loosely on the reality of women's lives in the past, it more clearly reflects contemporary concerns. Whilst Abrams (2000) has demonstrated the existence of a heroic discourse from nineteenth century traveller's accounts and fictional literature, I will show that, at the level of

ethno-history, or popular communal memory, the local hero discourse is a recent manifestation. Each characteristic of the discourse is explored, deconstructed in line with past opinions, beliefs and facts (evident from twentieth century documentary sources) and then ‘reconstructed’ in its current form and contextualized in the sphere of contemporary interests. I will suggest that it has developed in its current form due to the fact that it serves the interests of what Church identifies as the ‘project [that is] Shetland’ (1990 p.11). My intention here is not to deconstruct the myth for the sake of deconstruction, which would be a worthless exercise and would fail to acknowledge the significance of myths in society. It is also not to suggest that cultural myths are not ‘real’, and to replace the myth with an alternative ‘truth’. Indeed, myths are very ‘real’, as is shown in the next section, for instance in influencing the ways in which people define themselves in relation to local cultural values. My deconstruction of the myth represents an attempt to show that it has developed in the way it has because it has been used to serve particular interests in contemporary Shetland.

5.3.2 Shetland women did all the croft work in the absence of men?

This part of the myth is questionable on two counts. Firstly, that women did *all* aspects of croft work, and secondly, that they essentially had to work in the total absence of men.

In chapter 4, it was shown that croft work was highly gendered and women rarely participated in *all* aspects of croft work. This type of gendered division of croft work assumes that there was both a man and woman to do particular work, but even when there was no permanent man at home, some respondents recall paying

men to do specific tasks. When asked if there were men about to help when they were younger, one unmarried woman in her nineties stated,

Yeah, if du paid dem! (Jessie)

Based on my own interview material, and a body of oral records collated during the 1980s in Shetland and held at Shetland Archives, analysis of women's recollections of their mothers and grandmothers shows that croft work was divided along gender lines as far back as the mid nineteenth century. In chapter 1, I showed that the origins of Shetland crofting in connection with the *haaf* fishery meant that, from its inception, men were usually present at those times of year when 'heavy' work was being conducted, and a division of work along gender lines is characteristic of early crofting. Thus this aspect of the local hero discourse is questionable.

Secondly, the myth can be deconstructed on the count that women essentially worked in the absence of men. At one level, given men's employment patterns, there is a considerable degree of truth in this (chapter 1). However, the lack of men, particularly at some times of the year of *economically active age*, does not simply equate with a lack of men *per se*. There were often men living with women on crofts who participated in croft work. Given the predominance of the extended family in Shetland, it was common for a woman to have her father, uncle, brothers or sons living in her household who could assist with croft work. This was certainly the case during the twentieth century, as is evident from interviews. Black (1995) notes that, at times during the twentieth century some men worked entirely on the crofts. For others, their employment decisions were

influenced by their desire to participate in croft work.

There was usually one of the sons at home. Or my grandfather, it was never the womenfolk only (Lizzie)

Me father just wrought the croft...he didna have another job. There nae other body to work the croft. Because you see my mother had...she had five bairns before we left Collafirth so she just...well, she helpit ootside at times, ken, when she could manage to win fae the bairns (Inga)

Den a days there were a lot of people just living off the croft, you see. I never mind my dad work. They just managed off of the croft. And he was the coast-guard here. That was just paid very little, den a days it was just next to nothing. There were a lot of men home about then just working on the croft (Mary)

Some o dem [men] worked, on da coonty roads, because dey hed big crofts and their wives couldna manage. They couldna leave da bairns in even ta go oot ta the milking. I've seen some hed a chair thing dat dey would take dem in and sit dem in near ta dem. But it wis a job, you ken, you could manage if you were maybe keepin one cow, but you couldna manage wi a lot (KI,SA3/1/124)

Thus, although grounded in fact, the picture is not as clear cut or absolute as women simply working in the absence of men.

5.3.3 Shetland women were inherently hardy?

The second part of the myth that needs to be deconstructed is that Shetland

women were inherently hardy. I will show here that Shetland women did not have any biological, or ‘ancestral’, predisposition to ‘hardiness’ and that, faced with poverty and trying to cope in an extreme environment, some coped, whilst others failed. Some women were physically strong, others were frail, ill, or died young. Some required the assistance of others, or desperately wanted to leave crofting.

This deconstruction is based primarily on oral accounts from my interviewees, although it is to be assumed that women further back than this faced similar problems when trying to live their lives. I wish to write about some of those women who found crofting too arduous, too difficult, who were ill or weak and who were simply ‘normal’ women. I wish to show that Shetland crofting women were not necessarily ‘Amazonian’ creatures. The classic representation in books and exhibitions of ‘a crofting woman’, the old woman with a heaped *kishie* on her back, fails to acknowledge that some failed to fall into this category.

Mummy would’ve loved tae have gone – it [the croft] wis far too much work for her. She wis crippled wi rheumatism. She couldna manage it, wi’ her health. She haed a bridder in New Zealand who wanted wis a’ tae go dere, but Ellen wouldna leave (Jessie)

I was quite happy [to leave school] because my mother needed me so much. She wasna very strong. And when I was at school I was always worrying how she was managing. So I got up in the morning and got ready and got me breakfast and then I did what I could in the house. And then I hurried off to school and then at night when I got out I didna play wi’ the bairns or anything, I just came home again. And she left what she could, so I was quite happy to leave (Babsie)

She [step-mother] was ane of this kind that imagined if she got a breath of air she'd get a chill or something. She had spasms of that. They called it a rose...her face got awful red, her cheeks. My step-mother wouldna go oot the door and sometimes she'd be in bed wi' that. I haed to look after things (Ina)

I wis never good at milkin, I wis frightened...My granny always took me ta watch her milkin, but not me, I wouldn't go near da coo, I wis frightened it hit me (IW,SA3/1/13)

My mother died when she was sixty six. Me aunt died when she was seventy two. And it was just that they were worn out wi' the hard work (Ruby)

Another respondent recalls suffering from severe period pain to the extent that she was in agony at times, especially after doing physical work, and would have to resort to her bed.

In addition, women often depended on essential support networks, which often comprised mainly other women. Many interviewees refer to the support networks offered within families. As stated previously, the extended family formation was common, and often croft and domestic work, including child-rearing, were divided between women and the participation of children in croft and house work was also essential.

Mam and granny shared the hoosewark, yeah. Probably me mother did mair o' the cooking and that type of thing and me granny did mair o' the ootside work. (Bertha)

It wis an aaful worry for my mother – she'd five peerie bairns and sho worked da croft [when the father was at sea]. But we got it aa ploood you see, so I hed ta start, and no wonder I wis da youngest een aroond Weisdale dat could milk a coo. I mind my auntie comin and stayin when da rest o da peerie bairns were born (KI,SA3/1/124)

I would go out to work in the day and Brian's mother would look after the bairns when they wis peerie (Inga)

My uncle was going away to New Guinea...and me aunt was expecting this bairns and so she asked if she could come home to wir hoose to have this children. So my mother said yes, she could come and she would do all she could for her...We were in Sandness one day and someone said there were empty hoose at Seaview...so I went to stay with her because it was a good way fae the shop and they were still under a year when they flitted there (Bessie)

When we came home from school, I had all the dishes to wash, all the day's dishes. From the morning till night. Had to fetch in the water, and put the water on the stove, and wash all the dishes, fetch in the peats, and when the boys came home they had to start preparing the lambs' food (Peggy)

Based primarily on documentary evidence, including newspaper extracts and 'popular' material, the qualities of women that were stressed in the past were those of a 'traditional' female nature. For instance, Cluness states, 'a great part of the crofter's success is due to his wife...To many Shetlanders has been given this supreme gift of Heaven – a good mother' (1956 p.152). Not, then, the type of image conveyed by Mitchell's (1987) description of

women stopping only long enough to have their babies (see above). In addition, the interview material that has been collated during this project, suggests that women, certainly during the twentieth century, saw themselves very much in a 'traditional' female light and were keen to represent themselves in line with a domestic discourse (chapter 4).

5.3.4 Shetland was an egalitarian, or matriarchal society?

The final part of the myth to be challenged is that Shetland was an egalitarian, or matriarchal, society. I showed in chapter 4 that there was a clear division of labour along gender lines, equated with power inequalities, which argues against Shetland's definition as an egalitarian society. During the early twentieth century women in Shetland were not perceived as the primary figures in crofting, but were placed firmly in a 'traditional' female role. For instance Nicolson, a popular local historian defines a crofter as 'a *man* who prefers to live and work in an isolated community with few amenities...he has to combine the skills of carpenter, stone mason and boatmen' (1975a, p.116, my italics). Nicolson (ibid) does acknowledge that women assisted in croft work and describes some of the work they did, but he devotes only half a page to women's croft work, in contrast to a major section on knitting. A debate by the Burravoe Debating Society on 'Who wears da breeks' portrays a picture in which women were, *at that time*, perceived to be beginning to become more equal to men. One speaker argued 'Woman *now* considers herself man's equal in work, which she can do as well as he can. She is *no longer* a household drudge' (Shetland News, 23rd February, 1950, my italics). In a debate by the Althing Social Group in 1951, the speaker proposing the motion that the modern generation is unworthy of its successors' does not include women at all in

his descriptions of the hardier, more worthwhile beings of the past. In contrast, serving to highlight what is perceived as women's *increasing* liberation and contribution to non-domestic areas, one of those against his motion stated that 'today, too, women took their place in the business world' (Shetland Times, 16th February, 1951, my italics). Both these examples show a perception of *increasing* egalitarianism in Shetland society from the mid twentieth century onwards. Bertha Inkster takes a humorous look at 'traditional' Shetland poetry which, she suggests, portrays women in a sexist way (Bluemull Triangle, July 1994 p.8). Wills also suggests that Shetland society, both past and present, was characterised by inequality of the sexes, and states,

Men, particularly Shetland men, are reluctant to take a share of domesticity, and caring for the younger children...Look back at old photographs, as many are doing now in community history projects – will you not usually see the woman depicted at work, and the gentleman at leisure, pipe in mouth? (Nort About, May 1981 p.11).

Thus, clearly, the idea that women in Shetland had equality with men is a recent one.

5.4 Development of a myth: a sense of difference and a 'nationalistic' project

The development, and popularisation, of the 'local hero' discourse must be situated within a growing sense of Shetland's sense of self identity, which has manifested itself in a form of 'nationalism', or a strive for self-autonomy (Church, 1990). I will outline the desire of 'Shetland' to create a 'unique', 'worthy' culture that was distinguishable from the rest of Scotland and then demonstrate how the

‘local hero’ discourse of women embodies these attributes.

5.4.1 A resurgence of interest in Shetland’s cultural heritage and a sense of ‘self-identity’

A resurgence of popular interest in Shetland’s cultural heritage must be situated in a growing sense of ‘self-identity’ in Shetland, which occurred from the 1950s onwards (Church, 1990). In the post-war period, an economically depressed time for Shetland, the ‘New Shetlander’ journal was started in a conscious attempt to re-invigorate the Shetland sense of ‘identity’ and ‘community’ and which published a number of articles connecting economic activity to a sense of nationalism (Church, 1990). Shetland’s state of ‘community confidence and sense of local identity’ (Graham, J., 1990 p.138) was invigorated during the 1960s at a time when Shetland was experiencing a ‘mini-boom’, attracting investment moneys from Scandinavia and local investments in new projects (Withrington, 1983). A strive for increasing self-autonomy from the rest of Scotland was evident in SIC policies from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s. Taking their inspiration from a visit to Faroe in 1962 (Smith, 1977) a Zetland County Council³ (ZCC) report recommended solutions to Shetland’s problems, of an economic and cultural nature, stating that

All possible action should be taken to maintain a sense of Shetland identity – particularly in the young. There is a case for the establishment of a ‘Folk High School’, similar to the one in Thorshavn, which has contributed so much to the concept of Faroese nationhood. Any measures within the County Council’s power, e.g: publication of the proposed Shetland Book, should be pursued (1962 p.38).

Church states,

In 1962 for those members of the County Council, for those with even a limited sense of the possibilities of political power, the restoration of Shetland was...about authorizing a specific vision of the future that linked identity to entrepreneurship and ensuring the reproduction of this specific vision through the expansion of the present political technologies (1990 p.40).

He continues,

During this restoration...the local political machinery dispersed its power and delimited its connections to the British state apparatus through the articulation of a discourse of regional autonomy, making claims to a unique culture, heritage and identity (Church 1990, p.43).

Thus the 1950s and 1960s must be viewed as a period of conscious regeneration as a reaction to the high unemployment levels in the post war period and the continuing tide of depopulation. Manipulating Shetland's heritage in order to reinvent Shetland as a viable, potentially autonomous nation was central to this programme of regeneration.

5.4.2 The impact of oil

The impact of oil in the 1970s accelerated the trends that were previously evident. This is not to downplay its influence – the acceleration was acute, and the discourse of Shetland's 'uniqueness' and 'worthiness' was manifested in some highly visible ways. Monkton defines the late 1970s as the time of the peak of Shetland's awareness of itself in relation to the rest of Britain and Europe. Black (1995) notes that the construction phase at Sullom Voe between 1975-1982 was one in which particular anxiety was expressed about the environment and a traditional way of life (e.g: Nicolson, 1975a; 1975b). One local writer, recalling

his thoughts in 1969, states ‘my greatest fear for the future in 1969 was that Shetland would be totally swallowed up, muffled’ (Donald, 1983 p.215). Similar fears for Shetland’s future were also expressed by ‘outsiders’ (e.g: Bealby, Granger & Frisch, 1974). The impact of oil developments made people fear that their way of living was under threat, from an influx of people and new industry. One local writer states,

It is a truism that people fully appreciate something only when they think they are about to lose it. Certainly the threat of the oil invasion made Shetlanders more aware than ever of their local culture and its value (Graham, J., 1990 p.141).

However, as Renwanz notes, ‘oil had done more than make Shetlanders realise the “importance of their heritage”. Under the threat of oil, *they endeavoured to invent a unique culture for themselves*’ (1981 p.250, my italics). This ‘invention’ of culture stressed Shetland’s ‘difference’ from the rest of Scotland and was one in which ‘Shetlanders defined their way of life primarily in contrast to that of soothmothers on the mainland’ (Renwanz, 1981 p.7). In 1978 the SIC stated ‘Shetland has always been different, its history is different, its traditions are different...and it is more different now than it has ever been’ (1978, p.1). This heightened sense of difference was due to the discovery of oil which, it was suggested, set Shetland even further apart from her Scottish counterparts. Church suggests that the political and economic developments in Shetland from the 1960s onwards,

were marked by the creation of a certain textuality – the net result of both the articulation of the discourse of autonomy and a dispersion of political technologies authorising a specificity of Shetland imagery that imagined both nations of strict boundaries and communities of margins and

peripheries, that claimed both modernity and tradition, that wrote future and past in the present allotments of social identity (1990, p.44).

One crofter states ‘We never heard of the Shetland way of life before these oily men and soothmothers started coming up here. Now, that’s all we hear about’ (Renwanz, 1981 p.250). This statement raises an interesting point. At around the time of the oil developments there really was a ‘proliferation of discourse’ (Church, 1990 p.10) on ‘that indefinable but very real Shetland *way of life*’ (Friedenson, 1974 p.13, my italics).

Members of the general public were well aware of ‘outsiders’ interest in their unique culture, and considered themselves as ‘providing’ something different. One respondent, who provided bed and breakfast accommodation in the 1960s and 1970s states,

People come to Shetland to see the Shetland way of life and the way we live and such like...when I was keeping visitors that was what they were looking for, that was what they [the Tourist board] were promoting, was come and live as the crofters live. Experience the crofting way of life. People are not going to pay ridiculous fares to come to Shetland and live in a bed and breakfast that they could get in Inverness or Edinburgh
(Stella)

As Black (1995) notes, the historiography of Shetland has largely been left to local historians, some of whom tend to view the islands in an idealistic fashion (e.g: Cluness, 1956; Nicolson, 1972; Irvine, 1987a), and the discourse of self-autonomy and distinctiveness was reiterated through this medium, in addition to the local press and radio (Renwanz, 1981). For instance, Nicolson states,

‘Shetland has little in common with the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland...the culture is basically Scandinavian’ (1975a p.11). Elsewhere, Nicolson reveals some of the fears that locals felt about the potential threats of ‘oil’ and states that, in the advent of oil,

Shetlanders might be out-numbered eventually and people with different values would dictate the way of life. In their wake would come all the ills that then plagued larger societies – drug-taking, vandalism, theft and even murder (1975b p.79).

This theme was reiterated in fictional literature, as this extract reveals, ‘Willie was a fisherman. He had lived in Shetland all his days...He didn’t want oil to come, he knew that its coming could well be disastrous to his whole way of life’ (Irvine, 1979).

As stated in chapter 1, the notion of a crofting ‘way of life’ is not limited to Shetland (see Condry, 1980; Forsythe, 1980; Macdonald, 1997), both in terms of the way that ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ view their particular localities. However, what these studies have shown, as is evident in this study, is that, whilst people consider themselves ‘crofters’, and perhaps, at that level, as part of a wider ‘crofting community’, as embodied in Hunter’s (1976) publication, ‘crofting’ and the crofting ‘way of life’, is also inherently localised in terms of perception. Elsewhere I suggest that crofting women in Shetland to some extent identify themselves with other rural women, and that shared *rural* values are important. Concurrently, crofting and the ‘way of life’ are talked of as being particular to Shetland. The over-riding perception of Shetland as *unique*, and different from the rest of Scotland, may heighten the desire to articulate Shetland’s crofting way of life in local terms, but may also come down to the fact that people’s experience is

grounded in locality. To some extent, this may result in an exaggerated picture of the particularities of one community's 'way of life', but to some extent it must simply reflect a situation in which local nuances make a practice, or lifestyle, which may have underlying similarities, subtly, but significantly, different. For instance, one respondent, Mary, was quite shocked when I used Macdonald's (1997) example of men drinking whisky at sheep fanks and stated that 'nothing like dat would ever happen here!'.

5.4.3 A continuing sense of 'difference'

The nationalistic trends that were evident even before the 1970s have continued. Writing in the late 1980s Monkton states 'Shetland has to be classified by its overall identity, 'Shetland', rather than by localised groupings within it' (1987 p.15) and suggests that since Cohen's (e.g: 1979; 982) research the influence of individual communities has weakened as the total 'identity' of Shetland has become stronger'. Some interviewees revealed a strong sense of nationalistic identity and the sense of being separate from Scotland⁴. One of my respondents, when questioned as to whether she would call use the term crofter to describe herself stated,

**Oh yes, I'd say I'm a crofter – and I'm a Shetlander, not Scottish
(Bertha)**

Several of my interviewees displayed various degrees of antipathy towards 'outsiders', or 'blamed' them for particular negative developments in Shetland society. When asked about why informal community visiting had ceased one respondent stated,

Well, I suppose its maybe the incomers...(Marjory)

Another respondent stated,

Its [community] changed drastically. I live at this end and I'm a Shetlander, and the wife at lives at the far end is a Shetlander and in atween there is no Shetlanders! And they dinna understand what we used to do (Bertha)

As stated, the situation has 'calmed down' considerably since Renwanz (1983) conducted her research, and many native Shetlanders expressed the opposite opinion.

They're [Shetland crofters] been defensive in a sense that they didna want any intrusion but its no really of benefit to the community in the end. And there's this you canna hae...say 'sooth moothers' , but will they no learn the same as we learned? I think that we're too narrow minded like that (Netta)

5.4.4 The local hero discourse – difference, tradition and worthiness

Sutherland states, 'Fifty years ago the Shetland woman was little regarded. *Now* she is recognised as the equal she has always been.' (1974, p.6, my italics), noting the complete transformation in attitudes towards Shetland women that has occurred during the later twentieth century. The development of the local hero discourse must be situated within *recent* reinterpretations of Shetland's heritage, as an embodiment of various facets of the more generalised celebration of a reworked past.

I will show that women 'of the past' were certainly not accorded the same status, or valued in the same way 'in the past' as they have been in the later twentieth century. The celebration of 'traditional' crofting (see also chapter 5), and women's role within it, is a recent development. The emphasis for most of the

twentieth century was on trying to improve productivity and professionalize crofting (chapter 3). The examples provided below clearly demonstrate that women were not central 'heroic' figures in a popular discourse of Shetland's sense of identity until recently. That is not to say there was not some kind of 'heroic narrative' about women. Abrams' analysis of Shetland women's representations in nineteenth century traveller's reports and literature, identifies a 'heroic narrative structure' in these publications (2000, p.3). These accounts emphasise the ruggedness of the Shetland women, their hardiness etc, such as this extract from Conan-Doyle, 1880 (noted in Abrams, 2000).

I was led back to the ship by a wild, long-haired girl holding a torch, for the peat holes make it dangerous at night - I can see her now, her tangled black hair, her bare legs, madder-stained petticoat, and wild features under the glare of the torch.

The tragic heroine figure is represented in nineteenth century fictional literature. For instance, Saxby's (1876) novel, noted in Abrams (2000), *The Brother's Sacrifice* tells the story of Britta, who was widowed and left to bring up her son alone and how she had:

To pay the rent and retain the home which he [her husband] had provided for her, and which held so many tender associations, was the great ambition of Britta's life; but hard times came when there was no fish on the coast, and no corn or potatoes in the field, and Britta had often to send her little boy supperless to bed, while she sat till the small hours plying her knitting needles, the produce of which was all she had to depend on for tomorrow's dinner. She worked hard and long, and never murmured, but she could not keep the wolf from the door... She had no relations, and her neighbours had enough troubles of their own this season; besides, Britta was modest and

sensitive, and she could not bear to parade her poverty before the eyes of her kind but rude-minded neighbour (Saxby, 1876 p.42).

Thus, there was already a heroic woman discourse, but I would suggest that it, in the same way as the ‘Viking heritage’ and ‘traditional crofting’ did not become popular, at the level of ethno-history, and in its current form, until there was a catalyst for it to do so.

As shown above, Shetland’s growing sense of identity referred to a discourse that stresses its uniqueness and its difference from the rest of Scotland. From the 1960s, the SIC referred to Faroe in their attempts for autonomy, and Shetland’s ‘Viking roots’ were central in providing the required difference from Scotland. This discourse of a ‘Viking Shetland’, and a ‘traditional’ Shetland remain central to Shetland’s sense of identity and it is in this context that ‘women and crofting’ must be viewed. The local hero discourse draws upon elements of factual evidence, but it is reworked in line with the general considerations of a discourse of Shetland’s unique sense of identity, which resides in a unique, ‘Viking’, ‘traditional’ culture.

5.4.5 A heroic discourse – hardy Norse stock

The economic successes of the 1950s, and the potential threats from oil, that provided the catalyst for a resurgence of interest in Shetland’s heritage and drew on the past to create a contemporary identity for Shetland, inevitably drew on the ‘Viking heritage’ that had been celebrated, primarily at an intellectual level, since the nineteenth century (Cohen, 1983). As Church (1990) notes, the recreation of a past history at this time, the images

employed in Council reports and the types of popular publications that were being made stressed Shetland's 'Viking heritage', and sometimes clearly her links with Norway and Faroe. Cohen notes that since the late 1960s many Shetland intellectuals have rejected the image of Shetland's hardy Norse heritage as 'Viking Waffle' (1983 p.482). However, this has not lessened its continuing general popularity as a discourse of Shetland's past. Cohen (1983) suggests that Shetland's 'Norse past' has been sustained through the efforts of local antiquarians, symbolic representation and 'ritual' enactment. Up-Helly-Aa and the other fire festivals throughout Shetland provide a focus for ritual enactment of 'Viking heritage', and Norse imagery is employed in various contemporary contexts (Brown, C., 1997). This discourse is subject to a constant reworking, and, as Wills states 'ten years ago there were still many pressures on people not to go to the booze but now it is often accepted, or at least winked at, as another facet of the Shetland way of life – evidence of our 'Viking Heritage'' (1978, p.40).

This Norse Heritage discourse is structured round a heroic narrative. The hardiness of Shetland crofting women is represented in a heroic light. Their hardiness is represented as inherent in their make up as a sign of their 'Shetlandness', a cultural trait that is due to their Norse ancestry. In addition, it resides in the fact that they have been 'shaped' by the harsh conditions they were faced with. Once again, tenacity and toughness and 'Shetland' attributes. Thus the celebration of women as hardy, heroic and 'strong' figures 'fits' with the remits of the Norse heritage discourse. It is only recently that women's pasts, at a popular level, have been reworked and celebrated in this way. Obviously the depiction of

women as heroic, hardy figures has a basis in truth. Women were, indeed, faced with harsh conditions and they were doing hard physical work. However, the fact that they have only recently been celebrated to the degree that they are in contemporary discourses of Shetland, suggests that it represents part of a more general reworking of Shetland's past 'heritage'.

5.4.6 A traditional crofting way of life

The recent celebration of Shetland crofting *women* must be situated within a more general celebration of a 'traditional', and mythologized (Ratter, 1985), Shetland 'way of life', in which crofting is absolutely central (Renwanz, 1981). Renwanz (1981) notes that the way of life that people felt was threatened at the time of oil developments was felt to revolve around a nostalgia for crofting, especially as it had been practised at the turn of the century and between the two world wars. A local historian states, 'It was a hard life but a healthy one – an example of man living in harmony with his environment' (Nicolson, 1975b p.30). Church states 'in the modern history of Shetland there has been a subsumption of practices that imagined identity and community through the invention of tradition into a new 'regime of value'' (1990 p.59). Within this regime, value has been highly accorded to 'traditional' practices, including crofting, and 'traditional' values which were clearly contrastable with the values of 'oil'.

The reworking of 'traditional' crofting in such a positive light is a recent one. I showed in chapter 4 that, for much of the twentieth century, 'traditional' crofting was considered backward and uneconomic, and the emphasis was on professionalizing crofting. One of Renwanz' informants refers to bad treatment by

a Lerwick shop assistant because she was a country crofter, and a series of letters in the Shetland Times in 1917 depicts a division between Lerwick folk and crofters (Renwanz 1981). One of my respondents talked about feelings of inferiority because she came from a remote country location

We were pretty cut off, you ken. And then when we went to the school, it was about four and a half mile. And...I suppose kind of being on your own you were a bit kind of hilly wye, and you were a bit sensitive! Kinda felt awful sometimes! Ken, I got to like the school later on but I hated it first! (Christina)

Another respondent, in her late sixties states,

To an awful lot of people of my generation, they saw crofting as a life of slavery. And a drudge (Stella)

The reinterpretation of traditional crofting as entwined with a worthwhile ‘way of life’ is evident in this review of a Jenny Gilbertson film,

She [Jenny Gilbertson] caught their industry and something of the harshness of their lives, but managed at the same time to depict a measure of the contentment and the serenity that casting peats, spinning wool and mowing corn can bring (Nort Aboot, 1981).

The discourse focuses on contentment, on hard work and harsh conditions, but a time when people were perceived to be essentially more content. Appropriation of this discourse of crofting as being entwined with fundamental life values and a ‘traditional’ way of life is evident from interviewees’ responses.

Its certainly good for brining up a family here and you get, ken, well we ken all the rudiments of whit life is a’ about fae croftin’. I feel we hae to keep emphasising that to the likes of even Amy [granddaughter] and stuff (Netta)

I feel the kids grew up knowing about some...basic things that maybe they lack if they'd been raised in a town. And maybe it wis a healthier kinda life for them...(Marjory)

I think maybe there are different values...ken, not such an emphasis on doin' things fast or making money, folk want to live in a crofting area for different reasons (Joanne)

This reinterpretation of 'traditional crofting' as being entwined with certain practices that are peculiar to Shetland is central within the more general discourse of uniqueness and difference. Cluness, a popular local historian, describes the Shetlandic method of agriculture as being superior, and markedly different to the Scottish one,

Above all, the Shetlander has succeeded...in continuing by his own methods to wrest a living from the island soil while maintaining his manhood and independence. Scotsmen...have come to show him how to do better, and, after struggles more or less prolonged, have taken their departure (Cluness, 1956 p.152).

A celebration of 'traditional' crofting is evident in Shetland literature. Laurence Graham (1996) discusses the work of three popular poets since the World War II, including T. A. Robertson 'Vagaland', Stella Sutherland and Rhoda Bulter and notes that all three, and particularly Vagaland and Bulter, write about aspects of 'traditional' life. In contemporary Shetland, crofting provides a link to a romantic, heroic past, one which is far removed from the experience of many Shetlanders, as well as 'outsiders'. As Wills notes,

To the visitor sullied with the routine of factory and office working the day of the 'average' Shetlander has a certain appeal connected with romantic

notions about the hard but satisfying work of the countryman. But for the Lerwick factory worker who has no croft, doing boring and repetitive work on a knitting machine or a fish filleting line, the life of the only partly industrialised country folk has a similar appeal. Hence the popularity of mawkish dialect poetry glorifying “da aald days apo da croft”...the truth is that there are thousands of different ways of life in Shetland (1978 p.38).

However, it is the traditional crofting way of life that acts as a powerful discourse in contemporary Shetland and, within a contemporary regime of value, it has been accorded higher status than alternative histories. This process must be linked with the increasing removal of people from ‘traditional’ crofting itself, as a process of the move to a money economy, increasing access to consumer goods and ‘modern’ facilities, which inevitably makes it possible to view the past in a more idealistic fashion.

The process of reaching into a pre-industrialised past to provide a ‘worthy heritage’ is not unique to Shetland. McCrone identifies a similar process in Scotland and states ‘a considerable amount of effort has gone into discovering the “real” Scottish culture, especially in the pre-industrial past’ (1992 p.192). He states,

The debate...about “real” Scottish culture is almost inevitably going to be an historical excavation of the “golden age”, or an attempt to construct a pure national character free from alien and inferiorist influences...The search for a truly Scottish culture is inevitably retrospective and romantic, a celebration of the past (McCrone, Morris & Kieley, 1995 p.70).

Like traditions, myths connect with past realities, but they are built from a process of selective inclusion and exclusion (McCrone, 1992; Smith, 1999). Fischer states

‘ethnic re-creations are given impetus by the fear...of being levelled into identical industrial hominids’ (1986, p.197). This focussing on Shetland’s ‘golden age’ of subsistence crofting, makes reference to a time which is perceived as encompassing a ‘real’ Shetland, an epoch when people’s lives were perceived to be relatively untainted by the modern conditions of mass media, increasing immigration and centralisation. It embodies a purer, more ‘independent’ age, when hard work, community spirit and the ability to cope with harsh conditions were inherently entwined with being Shetland. The ‘local hero’ discourse of Shetland crofting women is contextualized in this one facet of Shetland’s past which represents ‘a reaching back into the ethnic past to obtain the *authentic* materials, and ethos for a distinct modern nation’ (Smith, 1999 p.12).

5.4.7 Singular identities and social egalitarianism

Several researchers have referred to an emphasis on the concept of social egalitarianism in the construction of a contemporary identity for Shetland (e.g: Renwanz, 1981; Monkton, 1987; Church, 1990). Renwanz states ‘Shetlanders in general, had come to believe that they were a special people, a community of equals, with a unique way of life’ (1981 p.249). Monkton (1987) suggests there has been a subsumption of individual and community identities as the identity of Shetland has grown stronger.

McCrone (1992) identifies social egalitarianism as central in Scotland’s current discourse of its identity, and some of his arguments are applicable to Shetland. McCrone (ibid) states that the myth that Scotland is a more socially egalitarian society than England, as represented in literature (e.g: Donaldson, 1974) as well

as ‘common belief’, is one of its most ‘powerful’ myths. Wodak et al. state, discursive constructions of nations and national identities...primarily emphasise national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity but largely ignore the intra-national differences (1999 p.4).

McCrone identifies the creation of a Scottish egalitarian myth as giving comfort to the nationalist ‘in providing a vision of a past as well as a future Scotland, democratic and different’ (1992 p.115). It is this same process which is evident in Shetland. However, in Shetland, alongside social egalitarianism, there is also an emphasis on gender egalitarianism, which is completely lacking in Scotland’s identity discourse (ibid, 1992). I would suggest that whilst Scotland’s emphasis on social egalitarianism is a means to distinguish itself from England, Shetland’s emphasis on gender egalitarianism is a means to distinguish itself from Scotland, as well as loosely basing itself on some facts about Shetland women. The fact that women did similar work to men can be interpreted as meaning equality with men, as this respondent’s extract reveals,

Equality was den a days too in a different wye. You were doin’ men’s work. (Ruby)

The adherence to the ‘project Shetland’, to use Church’s (1990 p.44) phrase, means that portraying an image of egalitarianism is actually more important than adhering to one’s other categories of reference. For instance, this statement by a man is revealing.

I dinna ken whit the men did then durin’ the winter – sat aroond and did nothin’ while the women did it a’ (Peter)

This man is effectively down-grading his own gender, in order to promote the discourse of Shetland women of the past. Such is the influence of the ‘local hero’ discourse, that it turns normative value systems upside down and even men can

celebrate women's achievements over men's.

5.4.8 Shetland women are 'different'

When the strands are tied together, that Shetland women were hardy, that they wielded more power than was usual, that they did work unheard of outside Shetland, it is apparent that this 'local hero' discourse of Shetland women fits neatly into the general discourse of 'the past' that Shetland has chosen to emphasise in the later twentieth century. Powerful, physically hardy women capable of doing 'masculine' work and living in the almost total absence of men represent a 'unique' manifestation, and clearly show that Shetland's heritage is different to Scotland's. The local hero discourse represents a selective remembering of a particular period of Shetland's past. Church (1990) and McCrone (1992) have shown how the search for a 'real' identity, in Shetland and Scotland respectively, is rooted in the discovery and reinterpretation of a pre-industrial 'golden age'. A time when 'outside' influences were not so readily evident, when people lived 'traditional', and more 'worthwhile' lives. Thus the 'local hero' discourse is inherently entwined with a more general discourse of Shetland's past, focussing on tradition, Norse heritage, uniqueness and difference.

5.5 Impact of the 'local hero' discourse on twentieth century

Shetland women

In this section, I will show that the 'local hero' discourse exerts an influence on the way that women who have crofted during the twentieth century perceive, and represent, their lives in crofting. I will show that the local hero discourse constitutes *the* dominant discourse of crofting women, to the extent that counter

histories are negated, or ignored, both at the level of ‘communal discourse’ as well as in women’s ‘personal’ stories. I will also show that the dominance of this discourse increases the sense of ambiguity that some younger women feel with regard to their relationship to crofting and is accorded more value than the non-local hero type lives lived by the majority of women in the twentieth century. This may seem to conflict with a myth that openly celebrates the role of women in Shetland. However, I would suggest that the local hero discourse is simply so far removed from the reality of the majority of women’s lives in the twentieth century that it is one that they find impossible to associate with on a personal level. The sense of alienation from the ideal is particularly evident in younger women’s accounts, whose experiences are vastly different to the mythological crofting woman figure, and adds to the fact that they fail to have a clearly identified, fully acknowledged, or ‘celebrated’ role in contemporary crofting.

5.5.1 Singular identities and the lack of counter histories

The local hero discourse has a major impact on the ways in which older women perceive, and represent, their stories of their lives in crofting. The dominance of this discourse effectively inhibits the possibility of counter histories. As McCrone notes ‘the search for a single carrier of national identity is doomed to ignore the pluralism and complexity of identities in the late twentieth century’ (1992 p.191).

The ‘local hero’ discourse also fails to accommodate the pluralism and complexity of identities in the *earlier* 20th century, and further back in history.

Wodak et al. state,

In imagining national singularity and homogeneity, members of a national community simultaneously construct the distinctions between themselves

and other nations, most notably when the other nationality is believed to exhibit traits similar to those of one's own national community (1999 p.4). Thus, women 'of the past' are constructed not only as 'equal to men', but, as a group, are assigned a singular identity. Church identifies the process of writing a singular history in Shetland.

It is through this vision, this shared gaze on a landscape now littered with memories, 'little crofts and tiny roofless croft houses', that connects, at least as far as can be officially imagined, all as having the same singular sense of culture. Forgetful of personal and counter histories, a singular gaze has become appropriated and institutionalised in the power of official memory: the hard but happy 'way of life' of the crofter (1990 p.79).

The various facets of the local hero myth were deconstructed above to show that women in 'the past' did, in fact, lead counter lives and this discussion highlighted the diversity of women's experiences as they deviated from the ideal. But such is the power of the dominant discourse on Shetland women of the past that there is effectively no room for these women and others in Shetland's past history. This is very clearly demonstrated by some older women's discourses of their participation in crofting during interviews. Many women gave 'blanket responses' about the 'fact' that men were away and the women did all the work in their absence. In a number of cases, this type of statement was made when I asked women to tell me about *their* experiences of crofting. Their accounts were influenced by an idealised image of 'the past'. As Wodak et al. state.

The narrated self...is also an 'other' to the extent that at least part of an individual narrative arises from the internalized attitudes, values, behavioural dispositions and patterns of action taken from important role models (1999 p.15).

One example, but typical of others, clearly demonstrates the telling of a 'communal history', when asked to talk about personal experience. When I asked one woman to tell me about her experience of crofting she stated,

The women did all the work while the men were away at the fishing, or the whaling. And the women did everything then because the men just weren't there (Matty))

I commented that her husband must have been away a lot of the time.

Oh no. He worked on the farm at Laxfrth. The only time he was away was during the war, and that was a terrible time (Matty)

During the interview, she described her husband's absence during the World War II, and the disruption this had caused her and her family. In his absence, she and her aunts ceased to work peats and bought in coal instead, because he was not there to cut them. They also cut back on stock because she did not have him to help her. Thus, her personal experience represented a major departure from her initial opening statement.

This type of response, a reiteration of the 'ideal', is due to the pervasiveness and power of the discourse of the past which has been appropriated to the extent that personal counter histories are downgraded. The idealised history of Shetland women has been appropriated to the extent that it is the 'right' history. This 'true' history was that which was presented to me partly because the interviewees simply wanted to tell me the 'proper' story. Because this popular history also fits in with Shetland's own sense of self identity, and self pride, it is better to tell this common story than a personal one which perhaps failed to live up to it.

Inevitably, 'personal narrative' draws on communal discourses, and stories are

reconstructed with reference to 'ideals' that may or may not fit closely with direct experience. The analysis of women's discourses as multi-layered stories that make reference to several ideals reveals a window on societal discourse, and the values and attitudes that influence the way women live their lives and present their lives to others. Thus, the impact of a communal discourse on women's stories is not perceived as 'negative' because it masks some kind of 'truth'. Indeed, 'experience' is shaped as much by perceptions, ideals and values as direct physical action. This research focuses on the diversity of referents that are available to women in structuring their identity, and the agency involved in doing so. The 'problem' with the singular, dominant 'local hero' discourse as representing Shetland women's 'past' resides in the fact that it has a negative impact in terms of the ways that women who have crofted during the twentieth century perceive, and represent, their lives in crofting. The reworking, and glorification, of the idea of 'traditional' crofting 'of the past' cannot accommodate more recent times, which are also 'the past'. Thus women crofting during the twentieth century, at a time when mechanisation was being introduced, when communications were improving and when crofting was becoming more 'professionalized' lack a place in this regime of value. Can the stories about crofting women who did *not* dell the fields, carry *kishies* on their backs or work without their husbands for years on end be accommodated and celebrated? *Their* stories are forgotten and ignored, buried beneath a glorified past. Women 'of the past' are not really celebrated on their own merit, but on what merit they can offer to contemporary Shetland. If Shetland women have been 'written into history', in terms of both written history and at the level of popular memory, then it has been at a simplistic level. Women's pasts need to be explored in their complexity and

diversity and a 'space' created for them to acknowledge their histories, and contribution to crofting, as being as worthwhile as the supposedly harder women of the past. My analysis of the impact of a dominant, singular history on women's lives is informed by feminist research issues. Leydesdorff states,

A great deal of feminist historiography originated from a need for a past with which the feminist movement, but also women individually, could identify.

Identification, and not only with the past, has from the start been a high priority with feminists...Were the Amazons not after all fabulous predecessors? (1989 p.14).

On the one hand it could be argued that the heroic Shetland women of the past, like the Amazons, are 'fabulous predecessors' with whom women can identify, but, as stated above, the myth is so effectively removed from the experiences and perceptions of even the older women in the interview sample, that it is impossible for women to effectively identify with this past. The need to write a more diverse history, which focuses on the multiplicity of experiences of twentieth century women in Shetland, is partly driven by the need to redress this lack of identification that women have with a sense of Shetland's past.

5.5.2 Masking of gender inequalities

In writing about Shetland women's history, I feel that it is particularly important to redress the myth that Shetland was an egalitarian, or even matriarchal society. It was clearly demonstrated above that Shetland was *not* an egalitarian society and divisions and inequalities have been 'masked over', and, in fact inverted, in order to promote 'Shetland's' interests. It also allows men to represent themselves in a positive light on the basis of an invented past. On a number of occasions, Shetland men were keen to emphasise to me the fact that, in the past, Shetland men had

assisted with domestic work and child-rearing and that Shetland men today were ‘new men’. Descriptions of both the type of work that they did in the past, and today, simply do not support this egalitarian myth. One man I spoke to defined himself as a ‘new man’, declaring his ability to change nappies and participate in all aspects of child rearing. When I interviewed his wife, she stated that whilst he was ‘good during the day’ with the children, and took the older children with him whilst doing some croft work, he certainly did not participate at bath-times, bed times or if the children were sick. His ‘new man’ description of himself was a selective reworking of the facts, in much the same way that the egalitarian society of the past is.

5.5.3 Negative impacts on younger crofting women

If older women felt a lack of identification with the ‘ideal’, then this is greatly magnified in younger women’s accounts. The association of women of ‘the past’ with ‘real’ crofting, adds to the ambiguity that some younger women have in identifying themselves with crofting. The local hero discourse was referred to by some younger women during interviews, and by older women who negatively assess the role of younger women in crofting in comparison to the ‘ideal’. The negative statements were most commonly presented at the time that I approached younger women to ask for an interview. When approaching women to be interviewed, I gave them some brief details about the research project, stating clearly that I wished to explore women’s experiences in crofting from the 1930s to the present day. One woman, aged forty stated,

**Dinna talk tae me! You’d be far better talking to mum, there was still
some real crofting going on then (Patti)**

Her mother reiterated the comment when I approached her,

**There no point talking to Patti about women in croftin'. The women
noo-a-days do nothin'. Even in my day croftin's changed dramatically. I
never haed to do anything lik the work of my grandmother, say (Mary)**

Her assertion that there was 'no point' in talking to her daughter and the fact that the women did 'nothing' in crofting at the present time, referred to a woman, in her forties, who was one of the most active crofters in my interview sample, responsible for management decisions, and all aspects of sheep work and paper work.

The examples below are similar in nature, stressing the lack of women's involvement in crofting compared with the hard work which was involved in the past.

**I don't know if I can tell you anything about crofting noo. Women dinna
do an awful lot on the croft, no lik whit it wis. They wrought awful hard
den-a-days. There's nothin' lik that noo (Marjory)**

**The women now a days don't take part in crofting. The men do it wi' all
the machinery. And the women are either at home or in a job. And I
think that's the way it'll be (Ruby)**

**I'm no the best person to talk to. Have you talked to Kitty? She did a lot
of croft work in her time, its no the same noo, I do very little (Frances)**

**I could not do the work that she [mother] did. No way that I could
(Peggy)**

A significant point is that younger women referred to 'the past' upon being approached to be interviewed about crofting and 'the past' nature of women's participation was viewed in a positive light in comparison to contemporary women's participation. I would suggest that part of the problem that younger women had in defining themselves clearly in relation to crofting is because of the persistence of this myth of the past. At a very simple level, it is impossible for younger women to 'live up' to the mythologized experience of older women.

When I began to ask around Shetland for names of potential, younger interviewees, the names of three women cropped up continually. All of these women were defined as being 'real' crofters, because they all had some special relationship to crofting. One was the local president of the SCU, another had run an agricultural museum and the other ran a 'croft trail' and was involved in breeding native Shetland species. These women were all highly involved in crofting and, to some extent, in terms of the degree of croft work they did and/or their knowledge of 'traditional' crofting, fell into the 'local hero' category, although they were all under the age of seventy. However, they did not represent the experience of the majority of younger women interviewed, and one in particular stressed the difference of her experience to the majority of women she knew, but it was their story that other people wanted me to tell. The story of the *majority* of women who participate in crofting to some degree, who may well have other jobs and who may not be involved in any highly visible sense in crofting could easily have been left by the wayside.

If ‘real’ crofting is, by definition, ‘traditional’ crofting, and belongs to a golden age of subsistence farming, what implications does this have for women crofting today? This issue is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, but I suggest here that the problem that confronts younger women is one of ambiguity, and lack of a clear association with crofting. The promotion of a myth of Shetland women of ‘the past’ is certainly not the only contributory factor to this state of affairs, but I would suggest, simply because a number of young women in the sample made reference to it, and assessed their participation in relation to the ‘ideal’, that is one contributory factor.

5.6 Conclusion

This exploration of the ‘local hero’ myth has shown how a selective remembering of the past has resulted in the celebration of Shetland women who crofted during a mythologized ‘golden age’ of subsistence crofting, and the development of a myth in order to serve contemporary Shetland’s interests. Contemporary crofting women’s identity is constructed, to some extent, with reference to that of women who crofted long before they were born. This myth influenced the ways in which women assess their lives in crofting, and the types of representations they offered during interviews. It is one that assumes supremacy over those personal histories that fail to live up to the ideal and, I would suggest, needs to be redressed in order to accommodate counter histories and acknowledge the role of women crofters during the twentieth century, right up to the present day. The roles of myths ‘of the past’ in influencing perceptions at the present should not be

dismissed lightly.

1. A word-search in the National Library of Scotland's on-line database revealed that there were 1299 entries of publications with 'Shetland' in the title. A word-search at the *Shetland Times* (Shetland's largest bookshop and publisher) revealed that they held 119 publications with the word 'Shetland' in the title, 115 of which were non-fiction. Various subjects were covered, including history, archaeology, folk-lore, music, dialect and natural history.
2. Based on 1998 figures, the *New Shetlander* had a circulation of 2000 and *Shetland Life* had a circulation of 2630.
3. The Zetland County Council merged with the Lerwick Town Council in 1975 to become the Shetland Islands Council
4. Conversations with a number of non-Shetlanders revealed that they had experienced a degree of antipathy towards them from some Shetlanders. One man who had lived in Shetland for a number of years told me he had experienced 'racism' for the first time in his life after living in Shetland.

Chapter 6

RECENT TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR SHETLAND WOMEN IN CROFTING

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the role of younger women in Shetland in crofting at the present time, and the potential future directions that women's participation may take. In chapter 4, I showed that, whilst the meanings women attached to crofting had witnessed a dramatic shift since the 1930s, it continued to act as a reference point in their discussions, and was drawn upon in order to explain and contextualize some of their actions. In this chapter, I explore in greater detail the meanings that women attach to crofting with regard to specific recent developments in crofting. In addition to interview material, 'official documentation', primarily produced by SERAD, is explored in order to identify, with reference to recent and proposed policy developments, current issues and potential future developments in crofting. The degree of congruence between 'official' views and women's own perceptions of their lives in crofting, including the degree to which women feel that policies are suited to their local conditions, and whether they feel that their opinions considered by policy makers, is explored. This is especially salient at a time when the Scottish Executive are committed to fostering a 'partnership' (Lord Sewel, 1997; SERAD, 2001a) with local communities, which includes streamlining policies, making them more 'user-friendly' at various levels, and increasing the degree of input that people have in the decision making process. The standpoint adopted in this analysis is similar to Winter's exploration of agricultural change and technology transfer who states,

Much of this paper has been a discussion of policy, but the final focus has been on farmers' knowledge. This alignment of topics is quite deliberate. For too long the policy debate has been conducted with little reference to farmers or their views of the world (1997 p.377).

The underlying theme addressed in this chapter is the ways in which local and non-local spheres interact, and employs Marsden's et al. concept of locality, or place, as

a meeting point where sets of social relations interact. At this point, new sets of relationships may come into being as the complex of social actors jostle for superiority, as actors formulate interests and as they attempt to impose them on others... What concerns us is how these sets of relationships shape the "local" and the "rural". Both are clearly an amalgam of the various social spheres (Marsden et al., 1993 p.140).

In recent years, rural policy has adopted a progressively broader focus, addressing issues such as population loss, economic diversification, social inclusion and environmental questions, redressing the post-war emphasis on production driven agriculture (Murdoch & Marsden, 1994). Recent SERAD documentation identifies the need to adopt a 'joined up' approach to rural issues with reference to environmental issues, diversification and agricultural production, in addition to other social issues including the provision of services and employment. This standpoint is evident from the statement that, 'protecting and enhancing the environment is not always easy while maintaining the competitiveness of business. Perhaps for the first time, this Strategy faces up to these tensions. It sets out how a more joined up approach to policy, harnessing the expertise of farmers and environmental interests and finding solutions which are good for the

environment and business can be used to tackle them' (SERAD, 2001a p.2). The specific objectives of the Crofters Commission in 1991 were to promote environmentally sensitive agriculture and the development of on croft economic opportunities including agricultural and non-agricultural diversification (The Crofters Commission, 1991).

In this chapter, I will focus on four of the main influences in crofting at present. I will discuss how women perceive crofting in relation to the environment, diversification, agricultural production and non-crofting employment prior to 'joining up' the separate strands in order to assess what crofting means to women at the end of the twentieth century, and what it may mean in the future. I will also explore the importance that women attach to crofting as a 'way of life', and part of their cultural heritage, building on issues that have been discussed in chapters 4 and 5. I will show that 'traditional' crofting has been reinterpreted, or redefined, as 'environmentally friendly' crofting, and that there is a commitment to environmental issues that closely 'fits' with a sense of cultural heritage and the concept of a way of life, in contrast to the idea of diversification. There are strong tensions between those who think that crofting should be agriculturally intensive, and those who define this as 'bad' crofting. Ultimately, women's accounts reflect the state of flux that crofting is in at the present time.

6.2 Crofting and the environment

In this section, I will explore recent developments in crofting with reference to environmental issues. I will identify some of the primary policies that have had, and will continue to have, a direct influence on crofting in Shetland. The initial

exploration of official directives acts as a basis from which to explore the impact of these developments on women's lives, with reference to interview material, and the degree of congruence between policy directives and women's own values and attitudes is explored.

6.2.1 Environmentally friendly schemes and directives

Across the developed world, agriculture has declined and restructured, and environmental issues have become increasingly important, with an emphasis on the environment as a common asset. The development of agro-environmental measures is generally presented as a response to the degradation, or the threat of degradation, of natural resources and the environment, caused by modern practices (Deverre, 1995). Recent SERAD publications and policies have highlighted the need to consider environmental issues with regard to agriculture and crofting. In Scotland, schemes to encourage the adoption of environmentally-friendly farming practices have operated for a number of years. Examples include the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes which were first introduced in 1987, the Organic Aid Scheme (OAS), which was introduced in 1994 and the Countryside Premium Scheme (CPS) which was introduced in 1997. The latest scheme is the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS), which covers the whole of Scotland and supersedes the ESA and CPS schemes (SERAD, 1991a).

At the time of fieldwork, the scheme in operation in Shetland was the ESA scheme, and the following discussion focuses on this scheme. The ESA scheme encourages environmentally friendly crofting by encouraging crofters to work to an agreed management plan with both long and short term objectives. The

principal proscription elements in Shetland are grassland bird measures and stock-control (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, 2000). Management measures to encourage the regeneration of wild flora and fauna include measures to encourage species, such as the corncrake, back into areas, and to restore aspects of the built environment. This often requires a reduction in stocking levels, a commitment to the rotation of stock in order to encourage floral regeneration, and other specific measures such as corncrake friendly grass cutting methods and the rebuilding of dry stone dykes. Participation in the scheme is voluntary, and crofters receive financial payments for continual environmentally friendly management and for capital outlay where it is required in order to manage the croft in accordance with the management plan. Fines are imposed if the agreement is broken. Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department (SOAFED), (which later became SERAD and, subsequently, SEERAD), and European Union (EU) assistance in the form of ESA subsidies has risen dramatically in Shetland since the mid 1990s¹.

Until recently, virtually all financial support for farming under the CAP was food related, with the main aims being food production and maintaining farmers' incomes (Scottish Crofters Union & Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 1992). Reforms to the CAP are partly driven by the (EU) recognition that measures were required to redress environmental damage caused by intensive farming methods (SOAFED, 1998). The significant reform with reference to Shetland is a shift from Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCA) subsidies (referred to as 'headage' payments during interviews and the following discussion) to Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) subsidies. This was

implemented in 2001 and meant a shift from a headage subsidy on sheep to an area based subsidy. The perceived environmental benefit would result from an anticipated reduction in sheep stocking levels, where stocking levels had been purposefully maintained at a high level in order to benefit from HLCA subsidies, and a resulting shift to less intensive farming methods.

6.2.2 Women's views of the environment

This discussion of women's views of environmental issues focuses on their attitudes towards the environment in general, as well as their specific views of the ESA scheme, which many participated in.

The younger women in my sample displayed a high awareness of environmental issues and varying degrees of commitment to 'the environment'. This environmental awareness is a recent trend as there is a marked difference between older and younger women's accounts with regard to environmental issues. Age is the most important factor in determining environmental attitudes, as cross-cultural differences, such as whether the women has originally come from Shetland or not, or whether they were from a crofting background, did not affect the degree to which the environment was talked about by women, and did not determine their participation in ESA schemes. No women over the age of sixty-six referred to the 'environment' during interviews and none were in ESA schemes². Slightly over half the sample under the age of sixty-six referred to the environment during interviews, all of whom were in an ESA scheme, (8 out of the twelve younger women who were in the scheme) with none of the active crofters who were not in ESA schemes referring to the environment. Where women expressed concerns

with the idea of environmental schemes or issues, these related to specifics, with the exception of one woman, Marjory, who referred to 'the environment' as 'all this save the flooers rubbish'. Her view did not correspond with the majority, in either its sentiments or the way it was expressed.

Of the twelve women who were in ESA schemes, there was a varying degree of commitment to the environment. This is similar to the findings of the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute (MLURI) survey, which was conducted throughout Scotland and explored attitudes towards, and participation in, ESA schemes. This survey showed that expected income benefits from joining the ESA scheme dominated the entry decisions of farmers, although conservation objectives were also a factor (MLURI, 2000). This survey also showed that those joining the scheme *earlier* tended to be more aware of the scheme, to be adequately informed and to have a stronger interest in conservation than those who had joined at a later date (ibid, 2000). Although all women *stated* a commitment to the environmental issues, over and above the financial incentives for participating in the scheme, the contradictory actions and statements of some respondents revealed that ESA payments provided the main, or sole, incentive to croft in an environmentally friendly way. As one respondent notes,

There an awful lot of folk thinks oh, this suits me, I get such and such,

but that doesna do the environment any good (Joan)

Other women displayed a very high commitment to environmental issues, as the following examples show.

If people were living on the individual crofts, their contribution then to the *environment* is very valuable. Because like, on an old croft here, we

don't graze it hard. And I've got two areas set aside for conservation.

During the summer months we don't graze at all. The one up there and the far park to that is principally wetland bird measures. And the rest of it is wildflower conservation (Stella)

But the thing I'm keen on...I'm no just interested in crofting – I really do think the environment is important... I ken the boys have both been left wi' a great sense of...environmental things. They ken a' aboot the place, aboot birds and...they ken a' aboot it but they just dinna lik croftin'. But I know its left them, ken...thinkin' more aboot their environment (Joan)

This respondent's commitment to the environment, over and above any payments she received from the ESA scheme was evident from the fact that she did not participate in certain aspects of the scheme that she felt were not suited to Shetland's environment (see below). It was extremely difficult to gauge the level of commitment to the environment, or the degree to which women discussed environmental issues simply due to the fact that they were receiving payment for them. One woman, whose relative was selling a piece of land, gave this statement, clearly displaying her dislike for 'greed' and her desire that a young person with no croft, who would farm in an environmentally friendly manner and be a part of the community, should be assigned the croft.

Maggie's selling her land and before it was on the market or anything, we heard rumours that Geordie was getting it. At the same time, Anne and Martin were right up with a plan – its just pure greed. He wants it for John but they've already got a few crofts...That's not what we want at all, its not about the money. We'd like someone young to get it – someone who doesn't have a lot, who'll just have the one croft and farm it in an environmentally

friendly way, and live in the community, not so its part of one massive sheep farm that's doing no good for the environment at all (Laura)

For this respondent, the social and environmental considerations of the croft land were presented as being of paramount importance during the interview. However, the land did not go on the open market and within a few months had gone to Geordie, the original protagonist, who had eight crofts already. This contradictory action reveals the types of problems in trying to assess a real level of commitment to environmental/social factors when practice sometimes fails to match sentiment.

For most women, the shift to a more environmentally friendly way of crofting was a recent development and, for many, dated from the time of their entry into an ESA scheme. It should also be noted that their participation in the scheme coincides with a time when crofting had witnessed a recent disastrous period with regard to falling sheep prices. However, this does not necessarily negate their environmental awareness. The financial incentives cannot be denied and are defined by Winter (1997) as the main instigation for a shift in National Farmers Union (NFU) attitudes towards conservation in the 1980s. The MLURI survey revealed the importance of financial incentives of the ESA scheme to their respondents, as almost half said that they would revert to some pre-ESA practices if the payments stopped, suggesting that if the scheme were terminated its less durable benefits could be lost (2000). However, it also showed that the majority of entrants indicated a greater interest in conservation since joining the scheme. Environmental awareness may have been recently discovered, but whether primarily for financial benefits, or to protect the environment, or, as in most cases, a mixture of both, the majority of younger women display an awareness of

environmental issues and a commitment to crofting in an environmentally friendly way.

I think we're seeing an interesting change of direction at the moment.

This environmental issues kinda encouraging...areas with trees, and areas free of animals to encourage wildlife...(Lizzie)

We are in the ESA scheme though, so we've got to keep the sheep off at particular times, which is actually a real drag sometimes. Like at this time of year we're really short on grass and there are parks you can't use. But then the environmental reasons are why we're in it (Laura)

We just recently joined the ESA. Which, em...apart from the obvious financial benefit o' it, it was more for environmental reasons that we were interested in it. Obviously the financial thing is important...we reduced stock when we went into the ESA (Frances)

The ESA really just fitted in with what we were doing. Because of the organisation of our parks you could move the animals round in a cycle and they just agreed really with what we wanted to do, which gave the parks a chance to recover. We would've been doing this anyway (Eleanor)

Something else which is a help, in a way, to the crofter is the ESA scheme. We only joined last year. We thought we'd get paid for doing something that we're already doing. They hae stipulations and you have to watch yoursel' (Patti)

Above, I outlined the main tenets of the ESA scheme, but some of those respondents who were committed to environmental issues prior to the introduction of such schemes, criticised them on the basis of being, in certain areas, unsuited to Shetland's conditions.

Wi' the ESA you canna cut your girse till the first of August. Not in the middle of July like we used to do. Because they say its cover for birds. But you can graze it right up till the last day of May. So the only wye you can do it is if you want to leave your girse growin' till August. What happens to the birds that's comin' early to nest? They nae where to nest, coz everything is grazed wi' mair sheep. You notice an ESA park and they just pile in the sheep and its absolutely like a table to the last day. I really think its wrang what they're makkin you do. To put in you have to cut your girse first of August. We used to never graze wir grass early so the grass is away and the birds can nest – even corncrakes would find cover if they ever cam back. So I think we loss £600 a year because we wilna fit into their scheme...I think SCFWAG – I go to meetings and that and there's so much I'd keep saying, but you canna do that, you needna bother, just say nothing (Joan)

This respondent revealed the types of tensions that can exist between Shetland crofters and centralised policies, and a number of other respondents also identified problems with the ESA scheme, and other environmental regulations, in Shetland.

The ESA scheme, which I've been promoting very, very strongly, I thought it was a great thing for crofters. Unfortunately, a lot of people went into the silage making aspect of that scheme. Where the silage maker mostly pays the cost of the winter feed for your animals. And yet I can see it in another five years time being the areas of land that's lying in poor quality and poor condition...There's nothing wrong wi' silage if

you've got a big enough place. That can be rotated on a five, six or seven year cycle. But on a little croft where its going to be silage making as long as silage is popular, I can see the crofts after five year constant silage...the grass is getting less and less for the simple reason that the colossal weight of the machinery is compacting the ground. When you get ground going like concrete, you don't get anything growing (Stella)

Its in wir own interests, crofters, to look after the land and the environment. Things like that. I think that the environmental and the crofting should be able to work hand in hand. But sometimes they go ower the top wi' things. I think there's a happy medium wi' everything. Some of the things like the concentration on silage making that people have been attracted to dinna suit the peerie crofts here (Lesley)

They're wanting to come oot wi' a thing noo that bans you fae feeding feed blocks. Which here, is vital to sheep. But its been dreamt up in the EC and the reason is they thought the water would hit the feed block and run ower it and put it into the streams and rivers, well...we dinnae hae ony rivers here...But I mean its just crazy, and they dinnae realise the knock-on effect that has, because if that goes through the folk that sell the feed blocks are going to loss oot, the folk that mak the feed blocks are going to loss their jobs, so what's going to cam o' dem? (Patti)

The ESA scheme is as bad [as other agricultural schemes and regulations]. Andy had a ram in one park for *one day*, less than a day, when he was going to show it and he lost his payments because he was

**spotted, or reported. Well, that's not interest in the environment is it,
that's just red tape, and they didn't listen to his explanations (Emma)**

Similar tensions between local and centralised, or scientific, knowledge have been noted by other researchers. With reference to the farmers on Pevensy Marsh, who participated in a 'Wildlife Enhancement Scheme' (WES), Clark and Murdoch state,

the WES did not allow the farmers to be identified as actors with any particular expertise in relation to the natural environment...the corollary of making farmers only fit for farming was that it bound nature more closely to science. Thus the WES consolidated the identities of the farmers *as* farmers and the scientists *as* scientists...the tension in the relationship between Pevensy farmers and the scientists derives from the seeming inability of the scientific network to be constructed in such a fashion that non-scientists are enrolled in ways which allow them to see that their understandings of the natural world are being valued in their own right (1997 p.54).

Thus, if partnership between agriculturalists and policy makers is to be anything other than empty rhetoric, this relationship and assumptions about identity and value of knowledge needs to be redressed.

Despite these tensions and some of the potential problems associated with the ESA scheme, all the women who were currently in the scheme stated that they would remain so or would participate in similar replacement schemes. The majority of younger women perceived their future as being based in environmentally friendly crofting and a number of respondents openly criticised intensive crofting methods as being detrimental to the environment.

You're still getting people grabbing the crofts. Coz if they have a quota and they have sheep on the land they're sure of that £29. And because of the £29 they have as many sheep as possible, and it doesn't bother them if the sheep is not in a fit enough state to slaughter and eat coz come the autumn they'll simply just shoot them and bury them and get their £29 a head! So really and truly modern politics is helping to destroy traditional crofting. And it's a shame, because in destroying traditional crofting, you're totally devastating rural areas and the environment (Stella)

It's a fairly strong community but they're all a bunch of back-stabbers – it's a selfish little world full of land-hungry, greedy people. I've never come across anything like it...They just want to increase their subsidy and over-farm it with too many sheep and ruin the environment in the process (Laura)

As soon as my dad died that's when they [the neighbours] started – they don't think its right that we should have the croft when they could add it to all theirs and fill in the missing piece. But to me that's no crofting at all. That's sheep farming, its not what crofting should be about. I mean the way we do it...we're never going to make a living or anything from it, but that's not what we have it for. I don't think crofting should be just about as many hundreds of sheep as you can keep...Its because of the subsidies – some of them are making up to £20,000-£30,000 – you can see why they're pissed off at someone like us preventing them from keeping another couple of hundred sheep. And I have to laugh when you see some 'crofter' on the telly complaining about sheep prices – I mean

crofting was never supposed to be farming, it was never supposed to provide the whole income – they're no crofters at all. I reckon they should do away with the subsidies – for crofters at any rate, maybe no in England with a big sheep farm like (Janet)

The headage payment really was a bad one. Add another twenty ewes, and add another fifty ewes, and so it went on (Lizzie)

The headage subsidy came in for a considerable amount of criticism on the basis that it had led to over-stocking of sheep, with detrimental effects for the environment, as well as leading to poor animal husbandry in some cases. However, with the exception of the woman above who had decided to cease receiving all subsidies, all of the women in the sample were in receipt of the headage subsidy. However, they were willing to see crofting moving towards different practices, although some concern was expressed about potential future directions and subsidy changes.

I don't know about these area payments...but I do think that there's far too much sheep in Shetland (Lizzie)

That's [subsidies] what keeps their head above water. The ones that make the money is the ones with the hill sheep because they're no being fed. But if it all changes they're the ones that are going to lose out. And the ones that are going to gain are the ones who have quite a big area but very few sheep. So its going to do a complete turn aroond... crofting's in a sorry state at the moment. Unless some radical changes are made crofting'll go to...peerie communities like this will have just three or four active crofters in it (Patti)

The main feeling expressed was one of concern for the future, but an acceptance that change was necessary, that the headage subsidy was detrimental to the environment, and that future directions had to consider environmental issues. The switch from headage to area based payments inevitably leads to a redistribution of expenditure away from relatively densely to relatively sparsely stocked farms. Statistical analysis confirms that stocking density is the only consistent driver for whether an individual farm gains or loses, relative to its previous HLCA payment level (SERAD, 2001b). A comparison of HLCA 2000 and LFASS expenditure impacts 2001, by Area Office revealed that Lerwick witnessed a loss of total expenditure from £1.86m to £1.75m, which meant an absolute mean loss of £50 per farm, or a relative loss of 2.9% per farm (ibid, 2001b). However, amendments to the scheme, including increasing the rates on improved grassland from their current level of 5 times the rough grazing rate to 6 times, and raising minimum stocking density requirements means that the comparison of HLCA 2000 and estimated LFASS (amended) 2002 expenditure would be a loss to Shetland from £1.86m to £1.8m, or an absolute gain per farm of £1, or 0.1% (ibid, 2001b).

Thus the views of the women interviewed accorded fairly closely with the official Scottish Executive directives. A survey throughout the crofting region by the Crofters Commission revealed that 41% of respondents felt that traditional, low-input crofting should be well placed to benefit from the CAP reform directed towards enhancing the environment, and 50% of respondents felt that crofting could make a significant contribution to the environment (The Crofters Commission, 1998). Lord Sewel states,

there are real opportunities to get away from the sterile confrontations between conservation and development, and build new relationships...I would like to see designations such as SSSIs, Special Areas and Conservation, and Special Protection Areas regarded as accolades from which local communities can gain real benefits, rather than as constraints (1997 p.6).

This view was certainly evident from my respondents, which contrasts with the antagonism towards the 'soothmoother' conservationists noted by Church (1990) ten years earlier. Women's awareness of the benefits of 'green tourism' (Lord Sewel, 1997) is evident from these statements.

Its in wir interests to preserve the environment, no just for wirselves, but it something that other people want to come to Shetland for. We hae such a beautiful landscape here, but its been over-grazed for years, but mair people'll want to come if its restored, and if we get the wildlife and the wild flooers back that we used to (Stella)

I really think we have to start looking after wir environment, partly I mean to encourage folks to come here, to spend money, to want to come on holiday to Shetland (Lesley)

Folk is attracted here for the bird-watching and enjoying the countryside...so really its in wir interest to encourage environmental regeneration (Lizzie)

The benefits of environmentally friendly crofting to tourism were also noted by the majority of respondents in a Crofters Commission survey (1998).

As shown above, the main concerns that respondents expressed about the environmental direction that crofting was heading in was that some of the measures were not suited to Shetland's environment and, as some of the statements above revealed, some women felt that the Shetland crofter's knowledge was not taken into consideration, and had been over-ridden. This, and the other negative remarks made about SERAD policies, including the potential impositions of heavy fines and 'red tape' were not directed towards the idea of environmental conservation itself, which was viewed very positively, but merely to SERAD's methods of policy implementation. Crofting in an environmentally sensitive manner, with the added inducement of financial benefits, was a way in which women evaluated their present role in crofting and envisaged the future of crofting in Shetland.

The discussion of environmental issues and crofting, to this point, could be applicable equally to men as well as women, as informal discussions with men revealed similar concerns and ideas for the future. The issue I wish to explore here is the potential impacts that an environmentally friendly form of crofting has for *women*, as well as, discussed above, crofting in general. I would suggest that a move to a more environmentally friendly form of agriculture does have several implications for women's participation in crofting, but that these must be tempered by the fact that women will continue to be increasingly involved in paid employment.

In chapter 4, I showed that crofting had been subject to a professionalized, masculine discourse throughout the twentieth century. I suggested that women

had felt marginalized from the main work of crofting, the physical, production aspect that was central to crofting during the twentieth century. I would suggest that a move to a more environmentally friendly, less intensive form of agriculture could reverse this trend to some extent and contribute to a situation in which women identify with crofting as key participants. A number of respondents saw themselves in the role of ‘keepers of the environment’, a definition which focuses on the social and environmental roles that crofters play.

The way I see it is we’re sort of...keepers of the land...At least the way we do it we can sort of help the land (Janet)

We work hard to look after the environment (Lesley)

One of the things I’ve really enjoyed doing in the last three years is being crofter warden. Through Shetland Crofters and Farmers Wildlife Advisory Group (SCFWAG) – they drew up a scheme to ask crofters in Shetland if they’d make a note of the breeding birds they’d seen on the croft and the wild floers. And in a way, that’s what being a crofter is about, you have a responsibility to looking after the environment, and keeping it, well, protected (Lizzie)

Thus the shift in emphasis, and interpretation of crofting, away from being a production driven enterprise means that women, as inhabitants of crofting areas and participants in environmentally crofting methods, can see themselves as playing a positive role in crofting, in a way that has been difficult for much of the twentieth century. The role of women as important players in crofting, when viewed from an environmental angle, does not depend on the amount of *work* they do, as it does when viewed from a production driven angle. It depends upon

living, and participating, in crofting communities and supporting the environmentally friendly direction that crofting has taken. I suggested above that, for the majority of women, the move towards a more environmentally friendly form of crofting was a recent development, but as it looks set to continue I would suggest that women's feelings of marginalization, as expressed in relation to croft work, will be replaced by a greater appreciation of the positive role they play in crofting. One respondent envisaged an environmentally friendly form of crofting that could be closely associated with women.

A wife really needs to have at least a part time job to finance the car, if it shouldn't be anything else. But there again, she'd have part time at home that she could tend a plot of tatties, and cabbage and they'd always have their vegetables. And the smaller the croft the better, because then you don't need a big quantity of animals to keep the grass under control. If you don't control it, the old dead grass eventually chokes out the wild flowers. But just enough to be a few lambs for their deep freeze and a couple of adults for reestit mutton and things like that. And I'm sure that it'd make a big difference to the wildlife in the countryside. It would go back to what it was, because there was always a lot of birds, and we actually used to have a lot of honey bees (Stella)

She envisaged a scene where small, environmentally friendly crofts could fit in with the part-time employment of women. I would suggest that the barrier to any increase in women's actual participation in the agricultural side of crofting would be due to their employment patterns and the availability of comparatively cheap, imported foodstuffs. As shown in chapter 4, the vast majority of respondents felt it was not worth the effort to grow crops, partly due to lack of time due to their

participation in paid employment, but also due to the fact that the goods were comparatively cheap and easily available. As one woman stated

Then you're not going to [grow crops] – because it would mean on my days off I'd be doing that, which I don't mind if it's a nice a day and I've got nothing else to do, but...(Frances)

From women's statements about their working lives, and the financial benefit they gained from working (see chapter 4), it would be difficult to envisage a significant reversal of the situation in which the croft once again provided a diversity of stock and crops and approached the level of a subsistence croft. In fact, one respondent felt that a move to a more environmentally friendly, less intensive form of agriculture, would require less agricultural participation of women and that more women would participate in full-time employment due to the decreased amount of time they would spend doing croft work.

Because of this ESA scheme, a lot of it really is just payin' folk to do nothing. Mair and mair women would go oot to maybe even full time work. Because there wouldn't be so much to do on the croft because of the conservation. Because...especially if its like sheep, because you'll just have your lambing and your clipping and your dipping, that's really the three main events in the sheep calendar. And I think a lot mair women would go oot and work. Because there nae reason to be tied home at the croft (Karen)

Thus the potential for a clearer association of women and crofting due to a shift to more environmentally friendly agricultural practices comes less from a major shift in what they *do*, in terms of work, but from the fact that, by definition, what you have to *do* to be a crofter will shift in such a way as to accommodate women as potentially equal players.

Murdoch & Marsden state,

The more diversified world in which farmers now operate confronts them with new levels of risk and new types of negotiation with external agencies, often quite removed from the familiar territory of the food system. Farmers and their families are thus learning fresh “rules of engagement” as they participate in these more unpredictable arenas. Under the old regime of “productivism” land could be regarded as firmly tied to agriculture and this tie stretched back into the past and forward into the future. Now, however, such certainty has gone and land must play its part in the new flexible order (1994 p.144).

Shetland crofting women’s enthusiasm for environmental schemes derives in part from the fact that crofting in an environmentally friendly manner is one which, whilst it requires a renegotiation of the recent, production driven direction that crofting has taken, is not a direction that significantly alters the fundamental relationship of crofters to the land. In rural areas, agriculture has directly influenced the structure and culture of rural societies (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). For the interviewees, crofting in an environmentally way ‘fitted in’, or could be ‘reworked’ to fit in (see below) with their idea of land and agriculture as being inextricably linked. Women were fully aware of the damage that had been done to their environment as a result of previous over-intensive land use, and recognised the need to redress this. Ultimately there is an association with both the land and with agricultural practices. In order to ensure future agriculture, the interviewees felt that it was in their interests to conserve the landscape. For many, the land is also their home, or an extension of it, and they were committed to preserving and enhancing the place that they lived in. A number of respondents expressed a desire to see habitats return to the way they had been in their younger

years. Thus environmentally friendly crofting, whilst it requires a shift in emphasis, does not require a wholesale reinterpretation of the role of crofters, which is still intrinsically entwined with the land, and with managing the land, even if in a different way. Furthermore, as discussed below, environmentally friendly crofting has been reinterpreted as ‘traditional’ crofting, and is perceived as something that ‘fits’ with Shetland’s culture and heritage. These issues are discussed below, where women’s views of environmental issues are explored in comparison to their views on some other recent directions.

6.3 Diversification

6.3.1 SERAD’s diversification policies

Another dominant trend in agricultural policy is that of diversification which recognises the fact that traditional farming practices are increasingly unable to be financially supportive and alternative, or supplemental, means of income are required if rural populations are to be maintained. Murdoch & Marsden (1994) suggest that diversification was seen as a means of ‘weaning’ farmers off price support as they came to supplement their income from non-agricultural sources, which would mean that public subsidies could be reduced and budgetary pressures eased. Resulting, to a great extent, from recent changes to the CAP there exists an identifiable relationship between the issue of rural tourism, agricultural policies and broader, regional development policies, where tourism is presented as a potential solution to the social and economic regeneration of rural areas (Cavaco, 1995; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Many of the non-agricultural diversification schemes are related to tourism, directly or indirectly, and the following discussion

focuses on tourism to a considerable extent as an area at the forefront of interviewees' opinions of diversification.

In line with SERAD's commitment to adopting a 'joined up' approach to rural policy, redressing social, agricultural and environmental issues, crofters in Shetland, and agriculturalists elsewhere, are being encouraged to 'diversify'. Financial incentives are available to encourage both agricultural and non-agricultural diversification projects. The current scheme in operation is the Agricultural Business Development Scheme (ABDS), which is jointly funded by SERAD and the EU. ABDS is a business development scheme for farmers/crofters operating under the Special Transitional Programme for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland under the Rural Development Regulation (RDR). The scheme can provide assistance towards investments in agricultural holdings and the development of new, or expansion of existing, agricultural or non-agricultural diversification enterprises, based either on or off-farm/croft to increase the income generating capacity of the farming family. It operates throughout the Highlands & Islands Special Transitional Programme area. Approved projects for Investments in Holdings and Agricultural Diversification may be offered grant of up to 50% in Less Favoured Areas (LFA) and up to 40% in non-LFA based on eligible expenditure. For non-agricultural diversification projects, grants of up to 50% may be offered. All offers are subject to the maximum grant ceiling of £40000 per agricultural business and non-agricultural diversification projects may be based on or off the agricultural holding. The list of activities eligible for support includes agricultural diversification into areas including soft fruit, vegetables, mushrooms and fibre goats. Leisure, recreation

and sporting facilities are eligible for funding, as is the retailing of agricultural products. Various aspects of the tourist industry are eligible for support, including the development of new or existing tourist accommodation, and facilities including heritage trails, craft enterprises and visitor centres.

6.3.2 Women's views of diversification

During interviews, I questioned women as to whether they had diversified, agriculturally or non-agriculturally, or whether they would consider doing so. Only one respondent had diversified agriculturally and two had diversified non-agriculturally. I will discuss women's responses to the idea of agricultural diversification prior to discussing their attitudes towards non-agricultural diversification.

With regard to agricultural diversification, only one respondent had ventured into a novel form of crofting. She recalled keeping goats when she and her husband began crofting in the 1990s.

Some things we've done on the croft that have been a disaster, no one has done locally...when it all went wrong it was apparent why they haven't done those things! For instance, keeping goats, its just not suitable for up here at all, and they're a bit like Houdini – they can get out of anything (Eleanor)

There was a general attitude that agricultural diversification was not suited to Shetland, and women referred to the extreme harshness of the environment and the distance of Shetland from commercial centres, which meant that their production costs were higher. The only area which respondents would consider diversifying into, agriculturally, was the production of trees, although only a few

respondents had grown trees in a limited capacity in order to receive ESA payments for doing so. Other aspects of agricultural diversification were generally dismissed as inherently unsuited to Shetland's environment.

What in God's name would we diversify into here? The weather's deteriorated, ony crops and that would be penalised by transport costs and onywye we're disadvantaged wi' the land here. I canna see that I'd be prepared to do onything but keepin' sheep and that's hard enoch (Patti)

Trees is fair enough...but getting' them to grow is a problem but I dinna think that here its really worth diversifying...it costs so much to produce things and its almost impossible to think of things...thriving in this environment (Frances)

I ken, lik, in Yell, there's folk makkin strawberries, but really, its few and far between. An' when you think o' it, we're disadvantaged here wi' the weather and the land. I dinna think many more would go in for agricultural diversification...maybe trees...a few...(Marjory)

I think that all the bodies that looks at diversification is doin' it all the wrang way. That's a sweeping statement, but I think that again, back to trees. Trees is super – in Scotland. But trees...I'll tell you one of the problems we're finding with trees, and don't get me wrong, I do like trees, but there's a tremendous amount of help to grow trees and how often do you see it comin' to pass, I mean they do struggle. But the few that is com is filled wi' things like rooks. Now rooks is fine in the middle of England in a big, open pasture, but here, well if you try and grow a

peerie bit of corn, wi' all the other adverse weather conditions and everything else, plus the fact that you get every rook in Shetland homing in on that corn – we had two hundred rooks on wir peerie bit of corn
(Joan)

The concerns voiced by my respondents about the disadvantages they face in terms of peripherality from markets, climate and land quality are mirrored in the following statement by the SCU president, Donnie MacLennan. With reference to the proposed RDR he states,

current and proposed support structures are not acknowledging the levels of disadvantage faced by crofters in Scotland's most peripheral areas... The Minister has unveiled his plans for farming, to encourage farmers and crofters to operate in environmentally friendly ways and to support afforestation of agricultural land. In so doing, once again the special needs of the smallest producers with fewest options on the worst quality land are insufficiently accounted for... While our initial calculations suggest that there are some crofters who may be slightly better off under the new scheme, there are many more who will be significantly worse off (SCU, 25th October, 2000).

The remits of non-agricultural diversification pertain primarily, though not exclusively, to tourist related developments which Sharpley & Sharpley define as 'the new 'cash crop' in the countryside' (1997 p.22). Whilst some respondents were open to the idea of diversification into tourism, the main barriers they anticipated were the high standards required by the Crofters Commission and the Tourist Board.

I just heard the other day that Ross Finnie is set aside a lump sum for diversification. And I guess folks will be looking at...especially providing accommodation and things like that on crofts. And I think that's good, especially for younger folks in crofting that has the energy to pursue that sorta thing...maybe get a chalet built or something. But at the same time, when you get the Department or the Commission involved in it you have to do it to such a high standard...(Lizzie)

So much [diversification] wouldna work here. Tourism is alright but the main thing is its Lerwick its confined to. You never see folk stopping here...they have to realise that folks, even that's on their own, they can't manage it all (Louise)

Why no fix up the old croft hoose on your place – even if you put a, well, maybe no a thatched roof because that's difficult, but mak it basic, for a camping bod or whatever. But the problem is environmental matters – you're no allowed to do that (Joan)

Some women who had previously diversified into tourist related activities identified the main problems as being to do with 'red-tape' and regulations.

We tried that [diversification into tourism] wi' a cottage, but there's so many regulations wi' that too. And it costs such a lot of money to get here. You can fly the Atlantic for less as what it costs to win fae Aberdeen to Sumburgh! (Patti)

I did B&B up to about 1979 and then the Scottish Tourist Board took over and environmental services came on the scene. And the rules and

regulations now is absolutely ridiculous... I was told that if I was to keep tourists I'd have to have a separate fridge, a separate deep freeze and I couldn't have a washing machine in the kitchen. And I just said stuff it!
(Stella)

The final concern that women expressed with reference to diversification, and particularly in relation to non-agricultural diversification, was a lack of enthusiasm towards the idea of accommodating tourists in their houses or on their crofts. They described the croft as their home and, for many, the satisfaction of living on a croft derives from the fact that it is associated with a 'way of life' (see below). Some interviewees also expressed a lack of desire to accommodate 'strangers' as a 'cultural trait'. Whilst the Shetlanders pride themselves on their hospitality, there was a strong reluctance to effectively open up your home, or croft, to tourists.

Sometimes I think about applying for some of these grants for diversification – I suppose that's a half baked plan. To mak a studio workshop or something. I think it's a crofting grant for so much – to diversify for crafts. We did think about B and B but that'd be your whole summer taken up again! Its no as if we haed an old hoose or onything that we could've done up as a chalet or anything – maybe then we could've done something. At wan time I think Sandy thought it would be good to get a hide doon bye here you could almost do a nature trail or something – you hae all this ideas and then you think of the work that haed to go into them! And you think well it would intrinsically change the place as well coz you'd have all this folk...(Joanne)

I think folks in Shetland just aren't too keen on haein' unken folk on their doorstep (Marjory)

I dinna lik the idea of havin' tourists, on my croft, in my home really, and to be honest I think that's true of a lot of folk here. Maybe it's a Shetland thing, but I think a lot of folk wouldna want to do B and B, or a chalet, or whatever up here (Lynn)

For some, too, the idea of non-agricultural diversification was completely removed from their idea of what it meant to be a crofter. For those women who were happy crofting, and who had always crofted, diversification represented a major departure from their sense of crofting identity.

Diversifying...what can you diversify to when you ken that you have crofting in your blood, you ken nothing else...(Lesley)

I don't fancy diversifying! I'm not artistic, I don't want to run my house as a B& B, I don't see what that's got to do wi' croftin' or what I do. I'd as soon hae ony other job (Libby)

This final statement encapsulates the general opinion of diversification, particularly into non-agricultural spheres, and highlights the contrast between women's perceptions of *diversification*, and *crofting in an environmentally friendly manner*. As shown above, crofting in an environmentally friendly manner does not demand a major change in focus of what crofting *is*. Diversification into non-agricultural spheres, on the other hand, does require a complete renegotiation of what it means to be a crofter, and it is one that is not easily accommodated. The three main objections to diversifying in this way were the fact that there were too

many regulations, that they would have people 'on their doorstep' and that they may as well take other paid employment as put up with the inconveniences of the first two in addition to doing a job. The first two objections are inherently entwined. There was a strong feeling against being told what to do in your own home or croft, as well as the feeling of not wishing to have people in your home or on your croft. The final point was that women could participate in paid employment instead of diversifying. The majority of younger women interviewed worked part-time, and their current employment pattern, as was shown in chapter 4, 'fitted in' with their family responsibilities to a high degree. Therefore, diversifying within the perimeters of the croft in order to have a job that could be done at home whilst caring for children was not necessarily a major incentive for women, when many already engaged in that type of employment. Perhaps this is one of the most important factors in explaining women's antipathy towards diversification. Crofting in Shetland has always required supplemental, non-agricultural income. Women have participated in this sphere either through knitting or off-croft employment. Since the 1960s women have increasingly undertaken part-time employment and thus have a long history of combining croft work with other work. The idea of diversification is, therefore, not a panacea to allow women to supplement their croft income by remaining on the croft, as it does not fall into a background of a 'stay at home' crofter's wife. It is assessed against women's current, and long-standing pattern of non-agricultural employment, and is considered to have several disadvantages over their existing employment patterns. Diversification into non-agricultural spheres would, it could be anticipated, provide a real role for women in 'traditional' sectors of arts and crafts and hospitality, but it was one that they simply did not wish to pursue. Page

& Getz (1997) note that regional studies of residents' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism (e.g: Allen, et al., 1988; Getz, 1994) revealed that choice was a key factor in influencing attitudes. Where tourism was perceived to be the only development option, support was likely to increase (Page & Getz, 1997). Thus the attitudes of Shetland women conform to this hypothesis in that they already have a choice in terms of development strategies.

With respect to both agricultural and non-agricultural diversification, the women felt that they, as Shetlanders, were particularly disadvantaged. This was expressed most clearly in relation to agricultural diversification, although, as several examples above show, there was also a feeling that Shetlanders were disadvantaged in relation to tourism. Some quoted the fact that Shetland had fewer visitors than elsewhere, that the cost of travelling to Shetland was prohibitively high², and that the tourist industry was focussed on Lerwick³. In fact, two women who rented out accommodation in a rural location revealed high, and continuous demand, throughout the summer months, so the attitude that there is not sufficient demand for tourist accommodation may be misled, but it is one which is held by many.

6.4 Agricultural production

SERAD directives recognise the need to maintain the agricultural aspects of crofting and, as shown above, have made provisions for specifics such as marketing and agricultural diversification. Whilst the recent drop in livestock prices has made crofting increasingly economically unviable, the continuing subsidy payments make it a worthwhile enterprise for some crofters. It was shown

above that the shift from headage to area payments would not cause a significant impact to the average crofting income in Shetland. In its 'Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture', the Scottish Executive state that the days of the mid 1990s, when farming incomes were reasonably good, are unlikely to return (SERAD, 2001a). They suggest that the level of EU support will fall over time because of the budgetary pressures of EU enlargement and there will be more pressure from the World Trade Organisation to move away from direct support to agriculture and to bring down prices to world market levels. This Strategy therefore concentrates on getting better returns from the market place, not subsidy.

Women's participation in agricultural crofting was discussed in detail in chapter 3, so this discussion will only briefly highlight a few points. The picture outlined was that women did not participate to a high degree in the agricultural croft work, and that women will not become more involved in agricultural production in the future, but will continue to increasingly seek outside paid employment.

Marsden et al. state,

the farming "lobby" is presented with a major dilemma in its uncertain moves away from an agricultural preservationist stance towards one more in favour of rural development. These moves run counter to the ingrained ideologies of productivism and stewardship and generate considerable internal strain for the farming community (1993 p.179).

They go on to suggest that even if farming represents only a residual element in the rural economy, it often retains a disproportionate social and ideological significance (ibid, 1993). One of the most interesting developments, as outlined above, is that women's interpretations of crofting *have* shifted to accommodate a

broader environmental and social definition. However, the meanings that people attach to crofting have always extended beyond its agricultural/ economic role and the recent *shift* in emphasis to an ‘environmental’ definition of crofting must be contextualized in relation to the fact that women interpret crofting as a ‘way of life’ and attach particular symbolic values to it (see below). However, for some, crofting continues to be defined, and ‘judged’ in terms of agricultural production. I showed in chapter 4 that, for the majority of the twentieth century, crofting has been influenced by the idea of professionalizing and modernising the ‘industry’ and terms such as it being ‘economically unviable’, as quoted above, certainly suggest that, at one significant level, crofting is defined by people in economic terms. Crofting is, at once, a way of life, a symbolic system inherently entwined with social relations and with the heritage and culture of Shetland, but it is also an activity that has, particularly at some times, provided a worthwhile income for some crofters. When discussing the potential future of crofting the theme of economic unviability was reiterated by many interviewees who stated that they could not envisage a future for crofting due to falling prices and the inability to make a living from it. There was, generally, a feeling of dismay at the difficulties faced by crofters as producers. When asked about how they saw the potential future of crofting, many women initially referred to crofting as an economic practice and defined solutions in economic terms.

Folk is just so scunnered wi’ it. Prices were really high and they fell

50% in two year (Patti)

Is there anything we can do to help him have a better future in crofting?

At the moment we think is it going to be worth it. We’re telling him noo, think of getting a job more than crofting – we told him crofting is a

**hobby, its no an annual income that it'd be worthwhile thinking about
(Louise)**

**I can see crofting becoming less and less attractive for everybody.
Because you have huge outgoings and very little coming in. And
sometimes it doesna even break even. You've got all the other outgoings
like renovating buildings...And if its costing you lots of money, people
will eventually say...(Frances)**

**Bobby haed enough. The prices got less and less, so he thought whit wis
the point and I tink a lot of others will go that wye too (Marjory)**

This feeling was, however, coupled with a recognition of the need to move forward, especially into environmental spheres, as many of the above quotes reveal. The interpretation of crofting's future as being dependent on its productive capacity appears to be in contrast to the earlier scenario of accepting that crofting has to become more environmentally friendly, less intensive and that change in the subsidy system is necessary. However, these contrasting quotes were not necessarily from different women, but often from the same woman within the same interview. They themselves at once interpreted crofting in terms of agricultural production, and envisaged this as determining its future, whilst at the same time offering a far broader definition of what the future of crofting entailed. Perhaps this reflects the fact that the interviews were conducted during a period of major change, flux, an economically depressed time in crofting, and one when alternatives are being introduced and pursued by crofters, but which are still at an early stage.

Capo states,

Some measures relating to income compensation [due to CAP reforms] do not take into account the fact that the farmer is, first of all, a producer. It is humiliating for him to be paid for not producing, or to be financially helped without considering the fruits of his labour, the foodstuffs grown on his farm (1995 p.306).

However, in contrast to Capo's findings, only one respondent felt that she would not wish to receive ESA subsidies, in contrast to her HLCA subsidy, and clearly contrasted the two.

**We did think about it [joining an ESA scheme], but in some ways wi dat
I think why should you get paid public money, coz that's what it is, for
really doin nothin. I mean a lot of folk torments you about subsidies for
sheep, but the way I see them is its actually keepin you on the land
(Joanne)**

This respondent made a clear distinction in the payments she received for being a producer and ESA payments. Although her view was not typical, it does reiterate a theme of 'doing nothing' than several other women referred to. Perhaps this image would pose more of a problem for men, in terms of their identity as 'crofters', who have, in recent years, done the majority of croft work.

A few of the respondents referred to the effects that having to shoot sheep that they could not sell had on them, or, for some more specifically, their husbands.

**I think that maybe this year if there a sheep cull again they should get
some o' yon buggers [the Crofters Commission] to see them. Sheep
getting a bullet in the back o' da head and kicked in the hole and see
what they mak o' it. Coz you've struggled to breed that oot o'...you got**

**expensive rams and everything but folk can only put up wi' it so lang
(Patti)**

**It wis heartbreaking for him last year wi' shooting the sheep, I think
David found that awful hard (Marjory)**

Certainly the impact of producing stock and having no market for it was perceived to be disastrous for crofters and perhaps explains the enthusiasm for a move to alternative forms of crofting, and subsidy provision, at the time the interviews were conducted. Marsden et al. suggest that,

locality and rurality are the representations of the outcomes of past practices within networks...the fact that past actions provide the 'standing conditions' for present and future actions helps us to understand how these conditions are skewed to facilitate the success of certain representations over others (1993 p.152).

Thus the role of the crofter as agricultural producer continues to influence the ways in which other discourses are appropriated and continues to act as a powerful metaphor for describing the current and future role of crofting.

A further major source of complaint concerned with agricultural production was the amount of paperwork involved in crofting, particularly filling in the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) forms, which was assessed in relation to the financial returns from crofting.

**Unless the red tape is cut and prices improve, then crofting has very
little of a future. I really do think an awful lot'll just jack it in. I think
so, because I think the paper-work and the red tape is going to put the
last nail in the coffin (Patti)**

Whilst this sentiment was typical of many, and whilst paper-work was generally felt to be far too time consuming and complicated, only one woman I spoke to had decided to 'opt-out' of the system.

I've had it with all their rules and regulations. We've decided to keep a cow for us, and a few sheep for the freezer, but I've had enough, of all the paperwork and the fines if things go wrong. They [the Crofters Commission] told me I couldn't run a croft without subsidies and I said watch me (Emma)

For the rest, in the area of agricultural production, as well as with reference to environmental and diversification issues, there were clear tensions between many respondents and the 'system' which were, nevertheless, put up with due to financial necessity.

6.5 Non-croft employment

In chapter 4, I showed that women commonly participated in non-croft employment, usually of a part-time nature, that 'fitted in' with their domestic responsibilities, so this discussion only briefly touches upon the issue of women's paid employment. Several of the statements above reveal that women envisage a continuing move towards 'outside' employment for themselves and other women. With the exception of one woman quoted above, none thought that women would do more croft work than they were doing at present, but envisaged outside employment as playing a similar, or increasingly important role in women's lives.

I don't think there's that many young anes around here...I doubt they'd go in for jobs more. I would think so (Christina)

**Women need jobs noo...they've had some freedom...I canna see dem
going back to more croftin' (Libby)**

**I wouldna anticipate doing more croft work, less maybe...probably
takkin' mair work (Lynn)**

As was shown in chapter 4, the majority of women identified with paid employment, as well as domestic work, far more clearly than they did with croft work and did not envisage any major change in this situation. The antipathy of respondents towards diversification suggests that no major change is likely in this sphere, as women were far keener to participate in paid employment than to engage in diversification schemes. This reiterates the fact that diversification is 'weighed up' in relation to existing financial structures and the element of choice that is available.

6.6 Special crofting grants

In this section, I will briefly explore the impact that the provision of particular grants to crofting has on the way in which women perceive crofting. Under the CBGLS eligible crofters can apply for a grant and loan for the construction of a new dwelling, or improvement of an existing croft house⁴. I will focus on this because, in a number of interviews, women revealed that this grant and loan had provided a major incentive for them to move to, or stay, in a crofting area when, in some cases, they otherwise would not have done so.

**We wanted to build a hoose here and we were eligible for a grant if we
came to live on this croft...if we were assigned it (Frances)**

this was me father's croft and really me and my husband took it on because we wanted to get the Commission grant to build the hoose, this hoose, wi. So we weren't wanting to be active crofters at all - we were just going to live on it at that time and get the grant...it was only for the grant that we took it. But I don't think there's anything wrong in that, like the grants encourage young folk to come and live in a place like this. If it hadn't been for that I really doubt we'd be here!...A lot of young people had the same idea as us, because the grant and loan adds up to £29,000 which is a lot (Janet)

We love it here noo, but when we married I suppose the main reason for wantin' to be on the croft was to get the Commission grant, which made a huge difference to wis because neither was earning much (Lynn)

Thus the availability of grants for eligible crofters provided a major incentive to remain in a crofting locality. For most, it was an additional element, coupled with the desire to remain near family and to run a croft, but for some it took precedent over other incentives to stay in a particular place. Whilst the grant provision continues, there will always be demand from young people to live in crofting localities if the responses of my interviewees are typical.

6.7 Traditional crofting and a way of life

In this section, I wish to explore some of the ways in which women interpret crofting that transcends its economic or agricultural role. In chapter 4, I explored the role of crofting in the symbolic construction of Shetland's 'sense of identity' and suggested that, for some women, crofting was intrinsically entwined with a sense of 'being Shetland'. In chapter 4, I showed that women 'used' crofting to

explain or contextualize actions with reference to paid employment and domestic responsibilities and that they considered their lives to be ‘different’ to varying extents from non-crofting women. I also showed that, whilst it was a flexible concept, crofting was imbued with connotations of ‘the family’, ‘community’ and emphasised ‘traditional’ values with regard to women. Here, I wish to extend the discussion in to show that crofting is associated with a ‘way of life’ and that ‘traditional crofting’ has been reworked as ‘environmentally friendly crofting’ and continues to operate as a central, but rejuvenated, facet of Shetland’s identity.

In chapters 4 and 5, I showed that for much of the twentieth century ‘traditional’ crofting was regarded as an outmoded form of agriculture in need of change.

Writing in 1990, Church notes that the crofter complains of being underdeveloped by the ‘political economy of authenticity’ (1990, p.98). Extracts from the Anderson Institute school publication in the 1950s and 1960s reveal a backlash against ‘tradition’ and ‘crofting’ by some youngsters, including this statement that,

the whole affair is hopeless, and only the unbelievable short-sightedness of the crofter-minded Shetlanders will refuse to face the facts. Shetland’s tradition is as dead as the dinosaur, and harping on it only causes unnecessary pain and boredom (Anderson Educational Institute 1958 p.6).

Another article in the publication takes an ironic view of ‘traditional’ attitudes to crofting,

Agriculture too is sadly neglected. The Shetlander prefers to keep to the old methods and to leave the new-fangled machinery alone as much as possible. ‘Da auld folk managed; why shouldna we?’. If the Shetlander would broaden his outlook and experiment, the agricultural situation would improve

immensely (Anderson Educational Institute, 1963 p.36-37).

The comparatively recent positive emphasis on traditional crofting is bound with a turn-around in attitudes towards environmentally friendly agriculture. Church suggests that many crofters who were increasingly subject to the scientific decrees of the Nature Conservancy Council, run by soothmothers, declaring their land sites of special scientific interest, complained of being 'museumified' and 'preserved to death' (Church, 1990 p.100). As noted above, this degree of antagonism was not evident from the women I interviewed who were, on the whole, supportive of a move to environmentally friendly crofting.

If environmentally friendly agriculture is viewed as a positive way forward, 'traditional' crofting is represented as just that. A consequence of this is that crofters are equipped with a degree of agency in that they interpret these developments as inherently entwined with their 'ways of doing things', as opposed to regarding these developments as something 'imposed' on them. They become actively involved in the process of identification with environmentally friendly crofting. A similar process is evident from Clark & Murdoch's (1997) research in Pevensey Marsh, South England, where English Nature developed the WES which aimed to maintain and improve the wildlife interest on selected Sites of Scientific Interest by paying landowners to adopt specified practices. They state,

Although the Pevensey farmers did not betray the scientists' representations of them...neither did they conform to the identity that WES had stipulated for them. Far from seeing their traditional practices as problematic the farmers claimed that these have a conservationist component. As evidence of this they pointed out that their traditional farming practices had allowed

wildlife to flourish on the Marsh... Their engagement with the natural world... allows them to ascribe a different character to nature as well as to identify themselves as knowledgeable actors where local understanding, in many respects, outweighs the more universal claims of the scientists (1997 pp.52-3).

Deverre states,

although farmers may endanger the natural environment on which they conduct their activities, they are also considered as traditional experts in the control of biological processes... The biological diversity of the countryside, the magnificent landscapes and the containment of forested areas are all factors that can be attributed to past agricultural practices and are... compatible with the function of food production. A return to the spirit of these practices, directed by environmental specialists, is therefore the guarantee of the maintenance of countryside quality, of which farmers are the guardians (1995 p.241).

In addition to being an idealised symbol of Shetland's identity, based in a past with little association to the present, however, 'traditional' crofting is, for some of the women in the sample, associated with 'environmentally friendly' crofting and a 'return' to traditional crofting is seen as a way forward for crofting in Shetland.

We're probably doing it a bit more the old way, ken, having a few hens and stuff too. In fact, we've probably more in common wi the old folk, but then, us and people wir age, but then the middle age group – they seem to see it as making as much as you can from it and keeping as many sheep (Janet)

The way wir old cousins here managed the croft was very environmentally friendly. And you wouldnae catch them over-grazing (Lizzie)

I do think the only way really forward is to go back, croft lik they used to, and just be much more organic and environmentally friendly (Joanne)

I suppose the way we croft is fairly traditional too in many ways. We don't have a tractor – the land's really soft and boggy there, and we have a special lawn mower thing to cut hay. Then we work it in the traditional way and put it loose into the shed...I'd like to see us move more to self sufficiency. We considered getting hens but we probably don't eat enough eggs to justify the cost of hen feed etc. We also thought about pigs, but there's no way I could feed them every day and then kill them! It's the same with cows, they're so lovely to look at (Laura)

This final respondent's statement is particularly interesting and shows the positive connotations imbued with 'traditional' crofting, even where, in practice, these appear contradictory. For instance, her interpretation of the way she and her partner croft as 'fairly traditional' is based purely on the fact that, due to boggy land, they cut hay instead of growing silage. They do not participate in any other 'traditional' aspects of crofting practice, they have no other crops or animals and have a high number of sheep (120 ewes, 149 lambs and 4 rams at the time of the interview).

A similar discourse of traditional/environmentally friendly crofting is evident from this statement by the SCU president, Donnie MacIennan who states,

Crofting has a critical role to play in sustaining and developing our more rural communities, and in maintaining the area's valued landscapes and biodiversity. It is a system whose time has effectively come again (SCU, 26th September, 2001).

The association of 'traditional' crofting with positive connotations, not only in a reworked and idealised symbolic identity for Shetland as based on an idealised past, but as, as one respondent, Joan, stated 'a way forward', will potentially open up new avenues for women's identity in crofting. I maintain that the discourse, as it stands at present of 'crofting women of the past' (chapter 5) is one that women cannot identify with. However, a reinterpretation of traditional crofting as an environmentally friendly, low intensive form of agriculture that represents 'the way forward', potentially shifts the focus back from crofting as an agricultural practice to a 'way of life'. Whilst women have always perceived the croft as their home and often a link to the past, during the later twentieth century they have been increasingly divorced from 'crofting' at an agricultural level. The shift to a more holistic definition that moves away from an emphasis on agricultural production towards environmental and social issues is one which, again, can incorporate women essentially as crofters, involved in the business of 'crofting' as opposed to being the wives of those who do the main croft work. Cohen (1987) suggested that crofting was inherently entwined with a sense of place, of culture and of belonging to the community. I would suggest that, since he conducted his research, the traditional concepts of crofting have been pulled apart, redefined, and, for some of the time, completely over-turned. The re-emphasis, or return, to a sense of place and lifestyle is a renegotiation of values, an incorporation of environmental awareness, and a more conscious awareness of the value of 'traditional' crofting in today's value system.

6.8 Conclusion

Women's accounts of their lives in crofting reflect the state of flux that crofting is in at the end of the twentieth century. Marsden et al. (1993) suggest that social and cultural tensions arise from the different visions and expectations people have about the same place. The tensions over the relative needs of an area for economic development and environmental protection are amongst the most acute (ibid, 1993). Estrada states,

In general, there is a process of redefining the role of agriculture and farmers in society, assigning them new functions beyond the traditional ones related exclusively to food production. This process creates uncertainty and an important identity crisis among farmers...farmers have lost their former economic context and legitimation, which have been so valuable as a guide to decision-making on their farms (1995 p.349).

These tensions are not only evident between participants, but within the accounts of individual women as they struggle to resolve what it is crofting means.

Sentiment and practice often appear contradictory, as women struggle to embrace new ideas and ways of doing things, that may contrast with the ideas and values they were raised with. Crofting is different things to different people, but there is a high degree of congruence in what women regarded as the future role of crofting, and women's role in crofting.

Primarily, women encompassed a broad definition of crofting, that emphasised both its environmental and social role. For many, this simply reflected the fact that crofting had become increasingly uneconomically viable in recent years and that crofting in an environmentally friendly way provided the only solution. Environmentally friendly crofting 'fitted in' with women's expectations of

crofting, in a way that diversification schemes did not. Indeed, environmentally friendly crofting is viewed as synonymous with 'traditional Shetland' crofting and, as such, 'fits in wi' the wye we aye did things'. Without requiring any change in the level of women's involvement in crofting, this shift away from a production oriented practice to a broader, and new, conceptual framework, means that it will be increasingly easy for women to associate themselves with crofting, in a way that was impossible for them to do so for much of the twentieth century. This conception will not be in any way similar to their female predecessors, but will be built on a new understanding of the relationship of people to crofting and the relationship of crofting to the environment and society.

This chapter has explored recent developments in crofting, and what women have to say about them, but informal discussions with men and observation whilst living within a crofting community reveal that, with regard to diversification, environmentalism and agricultural production, they expressed similar sentiments to the women. Perhaps this is not surprising. Men and women are equally having to embrace new concepts and practices to those they were raised with. The interesting point of possible departure is the impact that these developments could have on men and women. The changes suggest a potentially more equal role between men and women in terms of crofting identity as the role of crofter as producer is redefined and re-evaluated. On the one hand, this may make it easier for women to identify with crofting, whilst potentially having a greater impact on men's direct relationship with crofting in terms of the types of work they do.

1. In 1996, SOAFED and EU assistance in Shetland equalled £0.13m. This had risen to £0.36m in 1997, and to £0.76m in 1998.
2. The primary reason that no women in my sample over the age of sixty-six were in ESA schemes is that they were either not the named tenant of the croft, having assigned it to a younger family member, or they had sub-let their croft to a younger family member.
3. In fact, areas outwith Lerwick, based on calculations of bed spaces with providers who are registered with Shetland Islands Tourism, provide approximately 33% more tourist accommodation than Lerwick (SIC, 1999). The biggest single type of accommodation provided outwith Lerwick is self-catering accommodation, representing almost a third of the total bed spaces provided in country areas.
4. The CBGLS grant provision was £11,500 for building a new house, and £2000 for improving existing buildings. The loans available were £17,500 and £10,500 respectively. Loans are provided at a fixed rate of interest of 7% and are payable for periods of up to 40 years for new buildings and 20 years for improvements to existing buildings (SOAFED, 1999).

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this conclusion, I wish to summarise the results in relation to the research objectives as defined in chapter 1 which were:

- To explore the reciprocal structuring relationship between women and crofting in Shetland from the 1930s to the present day
- To assess whether crofting continues to be an important factor in structuring women's identity at the end of the twentieth century, and to explore the potential future directions that may occur with reference to Shetland women and crofting

The approach adopted meant that these issues were explored in relation to underlying themes:

- The interaction between local and non-local discourses
- The role of the past in the present

I shall assess the suitability of this approach and the implications of conducting a case-study. Given the emphasis on my role as researcher, I shall also review the impact that the research process has had on me and relate this to some of the broader research issues.

7.2 The reciprocal relationship between Shetland women and crofting from the 1930s to the present day.

This issue was explored in chapters 4 and 5 from two very different angles which, when drawn together, show the complexity of crofting at a symbolic level and demonstrates the ways in which local and non-local, and ‘past’ and ‘present’ interact in order to produce culturally specific meanings.

In chapter 4, I outlined the changing nature of women’s participation in crofting during the twentieth century. I suggested that crofting had increasingly become professionalized and masculinized. This was due to the appropriation of a ‘production driven’ discourse, as evident elsewhere in Britain, increasing mechanisation, and the increasing availability of comparatively cheap imported food products. As a result of these developments, many younger women felt increasingly marginalized from the ‘main’ work of crofting and did not participate to as high a degree in aspects of ‘direct’ agricultural production as women had done earlier in the twentieth century, or in comparison to men who are crofting today. I showed that, despite the changes that had occurred in the type of croft work that women did, crofting remained an important aspect of women’s lives. As a symbolic system of meanings, that extended beyond its agricultural/economic role, crofting provided a ‘reference point’ for women of all ages to explain, and contextualize, particular actions in relation to during interviews. Although crofting emerged as a fluid concept, its connotations were not limitless and women commonly referred to concepts of ‘family’, ‘tradition’ and ‘community’ and the impact that these values had on their lives. Furthermore, the significance of crofting in structuring women’s identity did not simply equate with what

women *do*, as demonstrated by the fact that some younger women more clearly defined it as a 'job' than older women, despite the fact that they typically did less croft work than the older women. Instead, crofting was reinterpreted as competing discourses of 'women's roles' were introduced and appropriated by women in Shetland.

The impact of crofting in structuring women's identity, and the role of women in shaping crofting, was, thus, explored against a backdrop of profound technological and communication developments, which allowed analysis of how local discourses of 'women's roles' and 'crofting' may be transformed through time as people come into contact with new ideas and practices. By exploring the ways in which women's lives in Shetland are influenced as the result of the interaction of Shetland with the 'outside world', as opposed to viewing Shetland as a 'closed society', it is possible to identify crofting as a highly complex, fluid, but vital concept.

In chapter 5, I continued to explore the reciprocal structuring relationship between women and crofting, by exploring crofting at the level of 'communal symbolism'. I explored the role of crofting women in structuring Shetland's sense of identity by demonstrating the existence of a popularised discourse of Shetland crofting women 'of the past'. I suggested that this was loosely founded in a 'golden age' of subsistence crofting and was manipulated to serve Shetland's sense of identity, by embodying the difference, uniqueness, hardiness and worthiness of 'Shetland'. I showed that the image of Shetland crofting women is inherently entwined with 'the past' and that this has implications for the ways in which younger women

associate themselves with crofting. This built on the issues raised in chapter 3 where I showed that women's 'personal' accounts were structured with reference to dominant cultural stereotypes that were accorded more significance within local value systems than women's own life histories. This discussion highlighted the ways in which 'the past', as a mythologized ideal, continues to exert an influence in the present and how what constitutes 'the past' represents a contemporary reworking, involving a process of selective remembering, exaggeration and forgetting, in line with current interests and values. A comparison of chapters 4 and 5 clearly shows that this celebration of Shetland crofting women of the past as 'local heroes' *is* a recent interpretation, as this discourse was not evident for the majority of the twentieth century, and fails to match the experience of the majority of Shetland crofting women during the twentieth century.

7.3 The significance of crofting to women at present and potential future directions.

This issue was explored in chapters 4, 5 and 6, from a variety of standpoints. In chapter 4 I showed that, as discussed above, the meanings women attached to crofting extended beyond its agricultural role and that it was imbued with particular connotations which meant that, during interviews, crofting was drawn upon by women and used to explain particular values and actions. In chapter 5, I showed that the concept of 'crofting women of the past', was central to Shetland at a communal, symbolic level, was celebrated by Shetlanders as part of their cultural heritage. In chapter 6, I explored more specifically what crofting meant to women in Shetland at the end of the twentieth century, and the potential future directions that may occur. This issue was explored in relation to recent policy

directives and focussed on the nature of interactions between centralised policy makers and local participants. I showed that women attached a number of meanings to crofting at the present day but that, generally, they expressed a need to 'move forward'. Few women were supportive of the idea of diversification, into agricultural or non-agricultural (primarily tourist related) spheres. They perceived this as inherently unsuited to Shetland's 'conditions', including climatic, locational and 'cultural' factors, and assessed it negatively in comparison to their existing dominant pattern of part time work which 'fitted in' with domestic and family responsibilities and provided supplementary income that could otherwise, potentially, been derived from diversification. A move to a more environmentally friendly form of agriculture was widely supported by younger women, although varying degrees of support were expressed. For some, their interest in the environment stemmed from the point of their participation in ESA schemes and was, perhaps, due to financial incentives more than a deep-rooted commitment to the environment. The majority of interviewees were not in favour of the 'headage' subsidy system, although, with one exception, they were all in receipt of this subsidy, and there was a general feeling of concern about impending changes to an area based subsidy. Their responses revealed that crofting was perceived to be in a state of flux. Initial statements such as crofting had 'no future' or a 'disastrous' future, backed up with descriptions of recent falling livestock prices, which placed the identity of the crofter as agricultural producer central stage, were tempered by discussions of the alternatives available. This state of 'flux' was evident from the contradictory statements by individual women within the same interview, as well as reflecting differing opinions about what crofting *is* or *should be*, between respondents.

I showed that a move to less intensive, more environmentally friendly crofting did not threaten the fundamental associations of crofting with the land and a sense of place and that it was reinterpreted as a ‘move back’ to ‘traditional’ crofting and, as such, ‘fitted in’ with Shetland’s perception of its cultural heritage. I also suggested that, whilst not causing any great shift in what women *do*, and envisaging a situation where women continue to engage in paid employment, a move to a more environmentally friendly form of crofting may make it easier for women to identify themselves as ‘crofters’, if the emphasis shifts from crofters as primarily producers towards being ‘guardians of the environment’.

7.4 The value of a case study

In chapter 2, I discussed why I felt a case study, involving qualitative research and approached from a feminist standpoint, had the potential to explore the research issues in depth and to address particular ‘wider’ issues. Here I will assess the main suitability of this approach and highlight some of the areas in which it has been illuminating with regard to ‘wider issues’.

In chapter 2, I suggested that, whilst a case study should not necessarily be chosen because of its ‘representativeness’, it should have the capacity to address wider issues. Murdoch & Marsden state,

Having subjected one particular place to in-depth analysis, a feeling prevails that the story cannot end there. Surely issues have been raised, subjects discussed, trends discerned, that are of much wider application? In one sense the whole rationale for place-specific study is what it can tell us about other places at other times (1994 p.219).

The approach I adopted was that, whilst conducting research within a geographically defined area, I perceived that area, and the people living within it, to be 'open' to new ideas and practices, and to be engaged in two way movements of people and ideas through various mediums. Thus the 'case study' does not represent a clearly demarcated geographical entity, but one which is highly permeable. One of the main underlying themes was to explore the interaction of the 'local' with the 'non-local', with reference to women's lives. The results from this research are thus instructive when exploring the lives of women, or people generally, in rural locations which have been involved in similar relationships at a time of technological and communication developments, such as Capo's (1995) study of Italian rural society. The exploration of the local and non-local is particularly significant at a time when moves are being made to create 'partnerships' between agriculturalists and policy makers, and the significance of this research in addressing these issues extends beyond Britain (e.g: Cavaco, 1995; Deverre, 1995).

Conducting research of crofting women in Shetland adds to the corpus of comparative material available on women in crofting, and more generally, rural communities. (e.g: Sachs, 1983; Rosenfield, 1985; Reimer, 1986; Whatmore, 1991a; Shortall, 1992). This provides a basis for further research where the similarities and difference of rural women's lives may be compared and contrasted. A detailed case study, such as this one, allows analysis of women's values and attitudes, as well as physical experiences, and enables comparison with other women's lives at an in depth level. A review of this material reveals that in many rural communities throughout Europe, such as Norway (Brandth, 1994),

increasing mechanisation has led to a ‘masculinization’ of agriculture, as evident in Shetland. It also revealed that rural women are primarily defined in relation to the domestic and rarely define themselves primarily as ‘farmers’. This research project has built upon the findings of these studies which have challenged the concept of the ‘family farm’ and have shown that gender inequalities and differences have been masked by this discourse (Ghorayshi, 1989). Thus, although the precise relationship of women in crofting in Shetland is related to their local situation, similarities of their lives to other rural women are evident and point to the potential of further comparative work.

Shetland shares many things in common with other crofting areas and, in exploring the changing circumstances of crofting women’s lives since the 1930s, one option would have been to adopt a broad, quantitative approach. However, whilst this would have provided a wealth of detail about women’s changing participation in croft work and increasing participation in paid employment, or what women *do*, it would have been entirely insufficient in providing any meaningful level of detail about women in Shetland perceive themselves in relation to crofting.

7.5 Myself and the research process – a reciprocal relationship

If my decision to go to Shetland in the first place was an impulsive one, related to my personal circumstances and how I viewed myself as a woman and mother at the time, then my decision to leave was almost equally impulsive. For the first eighteen months or so, my time in Shetland was incredibly happy. More than anything this was due to the fact that I loved being a mother. I relished being

single after being in a destructive relationship, and I loved being with Duncan. I don't know how much 'Shetland' contributed to this happiness, but it did nothing to mar it. I loved the home we made in our cottage on the hill, with its liberal sprinkling of gingham checks, and quite liked the isolation (although we had frequent visits from my mother). I really enjoyed my research, and thought that I would live in Shetland permanently once I had finished the project. I suppose the 'impulsive' decision to leave followed a couple of months of simmering doubts, but these were voiced in January 2000. In some ways, as outlined above, I was uncomfortable in the community. Things came to a head at the Boxing Day disco in 1999. Having tried to be a 'respectable' mother within the community, I think I finally realised that I really was not being 'myself' at all. In public, I ended up extremely drunk, maudlin, and overly friendly (in a reciprocal kind of way) with the platonic male friend who was staying at my house for Christmas. And I enjoyed it – I no longer wanted to be *just* 'Duncan's mum'. I didn't care what anyone thought of me – I just felt a release of pressure and the desire to go and live somewhere where nobody was interested in me, and where I could 'fit in', if I had any desire to do so, without trying to be someone who I wasn't. I don't wish to 'blame' anyone in Shetland for making me feel that I had to conform to any way of life – the pressure was entirely self imposed. Plenty of people live 'alternative' lifestyles in Shetland, but I did not want to – I wanted to 'fit in' and be accepted by the locals. My change of heart was probably also prompted by the fact that Duncan was becoming older, and I had rediscovered my commitment to pursue an academic career. As a mother, I was in a completely different place to which I had been when I had gone to Shetland. In contrast to being completely tied up with Duncan, I wanted to move back south and to develop a social life that

did not revolve around him. Both my behaviour at the disco and my refocusing of priorities reflected my confidence in being a mother – I no longer felt that I had to conform to other people's expectations, or at least, not to the same extent, and that I could provide a happy home for Duncan even if it wasn't in a rural idyll.

The above sketch of my reasons for leaving is offered to show that the 'research process' cannot be disentangled from my personal circumstances more generally.

I have to admit that I, naively, did not think that the research process would have any great impact on me at all. My literature review of qualitative research methods covered works by researchers who claimed to have been profoundly affected by the research process (e.g: Griffiths, 1995; Foltz & Griffin, 1996).

However, whilst I could understand this in the context of conducting research into, say, terminally ill patients, I found it hard to think that studying women and crofting would have much of an impact on me. In some ways I was right. Whilst I really enjoyed conducting the interviews, and meeting some fascinating women, I did not get overly involved with interviewees, or feel much of an emotional connection with them. I did regard the interviews as 'work', and, even when the stories were sad, I did not feel particularly emotionally affected. However, the research process had a far greater impact on me than I had expected. This was due to the subject matter and the stage that I was at in my life. The themes that I was exploring, including how women managed to combine work and home life, the construction of women's identity in relation to dominant discourses, and the ways in which women structure their own stories, provided me with an insight into aspects of my own life. I think I would have had a very different experience of Shetland had I not been a mother and/ or had I not been single, but that my

circumstances at that time have brought some insights to the project that may have been missing otherwise. Equally, particularly in relation to the ways in which women employ agency in conforming to ‘ideals’, the research process helped me to see that this was exactly what I did, and the pressures that doing so, when it is to the extent of really masking ‘other’ aspects of one’s identity, can create.

7.6 Conclusion

The research issues have been explored at a level that addresses them in detail and has provided a wealth of in depth material. It has revealed the complexity of crofting, the impact that it has in structuring women’s identity, and the significance of the role that women in Shetland have played in crofting during the twentieth century. It is a role that is not easily defined, in contrast to the idealised crofting woman of the past, but one which is no less important. This research has shown that, at the start of the new millennium, women’s identities with reference to crofting are in a state of renegotiation. The recent shift in emphasis towards an environmental discourse of crofting in Shetland, and the reinterpretation of ‘traditional’ crofting in line with contemporary values, means that women may, in the twenty-first century, identify with crofting to a greater extent, and at different levels, than they have done for much of the twentieth century.

Ultimately, this thesis represents *my* history of Shetland. Like the subject matter, its production is one which draws upon past, present and future. It is unlikely that I would ever have gone to Shetland, or produced this thesis, if I had not been influenced by romanticised myths of ‘the past’, which I have tried to unravel. Written in the present, it reflects my own concerns of the time – someone else

might have written a quite different history. The future comes into play in the fact that I, like many other writers on crofting, regard crofting as integral to survival and regeneration of rural communities in crofting areas. This ‘history’, therefore, represents the point at which these influences come together to outline aspects of women in Shetland’s lives from the 1930s to the present day.

Appendix 1

**Size variability of major and minor agricultural holdings in North-west
region (actual)**

	0-<2 ha	2-<5 ha	5-<10 ha	10-<20 ha	20-<50 ha	50-<100 ha	100-<200 ha	200+ ha
Shetland	156	383	367	406	415	181	96	61
Orkney	270	308	217	272	392	245	125	72
Western Isles	2193	2124	993	656	219	47	25	41
Highland	2228	2422	1364	1014	1036	545	438	800

Appendix 2

**Size variability of major and minor agricultural holdings in North-west
region (actual)**

	0-<2 ha	2-<5 ha	5-<10 ha	10-<20 ha	20-<50 ha	50-<100 ha	100-<200 ha	200+ ha
Shetland	7.5	18.54	17.77	19.66	20.09	8.76	4.64	2.95
Orkney	14.2	16.2	11.41	14.31	20.62	12.88	6.57	3.78
Western Isles	34.82	33.72	15.76	10.41	3.48	0.75	0.4	0.65
Highland	22.63	24.6	13.85	10.3	10.52	5.53	4.45	8.12

Appendix 3

Women's descriptions

Babsie

Babsie is 78 years old. She lives in central Shetland. She was born and raised on a croft in Shetland, but moved to the croft she now lives in upon marriage. Her husband is no longer alive, but they concentrated on small scale dairy farming when he was. Today, she no longer actively crofts. She has adult children and grand children and never 'went out' to work, although much of her time was spent knitting.

Bertha

Bertha is 64 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She continues to live on the croft where she was raised, but no longer participates in croft work. She is unmarried and has worked as a school cleaner and in the post office. She has also always derived an income from knitting.

Bessie

Bessie is 93 years old and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She spent her childhood on a croft, but after leaving to work at the herring gutting, and subsequently getting married and moving to her own house, she has not crofted. She has an adult child and grandchildren and, in addition to herring gutting, has worked in service, including a spell in England. She has won prizes for her knitting.

Christina

Christina is 72 years old and lives in central Shetland. She is from a crofting background in Shetland, and moved to the croft she is presently in upon marriage. She has worked in service, and lived on the mainland of Scotland whilst she did a qualification in domestic science. She has children and grandchildren and, in addition to working in service, has also worked part time as a cleaner and knits.

Emma

Emma is 35 years old and is originally from England. She is from a farming background and she and her partner moved to Shetland about ten years ago with the wish to croft. She works part time in a shop and participates to a high degree in croft work. She has a child.

Eleanor

Eleanor is 55 years old and works full time in a professional capacity. She is originally from England and she and her husband moved to the west coast of Shetland about five years ago. Her husband does the majority of croft work, and she considers the croft to be a 'hobby'. She has one adult child.

Frances

Frances is 39 years old and works full time in the health care field. She is from a Shetland crofting background, and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She is married with three young children and participates in croft work, although she describes her husband as doing the 'main' work.

Ina

Ina is 99 years old and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She is from a Shetland crofting background, and participated to a high degree in croft work when younger. Today the croft is run by her children. Ina never 'went out' to work, but knitted. She has adult children, grand children and great-grand children.

Inga

Ina is 87 years old and lives in the north of Shetland. She is from a Shetland crofting background and lives on the croft she moved to upon marriage. She is widowed and has adult children and the croft has been assigned to a family member. She never worked outside the home but knitted to a great extent. When younger, she participated to a high degree in croft work.

Janet

Janet is 24 years old and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She is married with young children and works part time. She is from a Shetland crofting background and was assigned the croft she lives on by her late father. She participates in croft work.

Jean

Jean is 64 years old and comes from a Shetland crofting background. She lives on the croft where she grew up and continues to do some croft work. She is unmarried and has had several jobs including school cleaner and working in a fish factory. She lives in the north of Shetland.

Jessie

Jessie is 95 years old and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She has never married and lives with her sister on the croft that she was assigned by her late, widowed mother. She still does croft work, including working with peats. She has worked in a caring capacity when younger, and also knitted profusely.

Joan

Joan is 54 and lives in the south west of Shetland. She is married with adult children. She is from a Shetland, but not crofting, background, and moved to the croft where she now lives, which was assigned from a relative of her father, after she married. She is highly committed to 'traditional' crofting, and runs a croft trail. She has worked in various capacities 'outside the home', in the service provision sector.

Joanne

Joanne is 51 years old. She is from a Shetland, but not crofting, background. She and her husband made the decision to move from Lerwick to a croft in the west of Shetland. She has adult and school age children, and has worked part time as a school cook and in a fish processing factory. She participates in croft work, although she describes her husband as doing the 'heavier' work.

Karen

Karen is 43 years old and lives in the north of Shetland. She is from a Shetland crofting background, and moved to the croft where she now lives upon marriage to her husband, with it being assigned to him. She has teenage children and has several part time jobs including carer, shop assistant and cleaner. She participates in croft work.

Katie

Katie is 93 years old and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She is from a Shetland crofting background and lives in the same house where she grew up. She is widowed with children. She never worked 'outside the home', but participated in croft work to a high degree and continues to knit to this day.

Laura

Laura is 30 years old and recently came to Shetland with her partner, who had been assigned a croft by a relative, from outside Europe. She has no children and works part time in a shop. She participates in croft work, but describes herself as the 'helper'.

Lesley

Lesley is 59 years old and has lived in Shetland most of her adult life, after going there on holiday and meeting her late husband. She is originally from a Scottish farming background. She has adult children and is highly committed to crofting, being involved at a voluntary and political level with crofting organisations.

Libby

Libby is 63 years old and is from Shetland. Originally she lived on a farm in Shetland, but later the family lived on a croft. After marriage, she moved to the croft she presently occupies. She still participates to a high degree in crofting and describes herself as being far more interested in crofting than her husband. She has adult children and grand children. She has always knitted.

Lizzie

Lizzie is 60 and lives on the west coast of Shetland. She is from a Shetland crofting background, moving to the croft she occupies today, which was assigned by relatives, when her family was young. She has adult children, and has assigned the croft to a son. She continues to participate in crofting. She decided not to pursue a career in journalism and is highly involved with voluntary community work.

Louise

Louise is from a farming background in Orkney, and moved to Shetland to stay with relatives as a teenager. She is married with a young family. She works part time in the caring sector, having worked full time before having children, and participates in croft work. She lives in central Shetland.

Lynn

Lynn is 35 years old and comes from a Shetland crofting background. She is married with young children and works part time in the caring sector. She participates in croft work, but describes her husband as doing more work than her. She lives in the south of Shetland.

Maggie

Maggie is 80 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She is widowed with an adult family. When younger, she participated to a high degree in croft work, in addition to knitting. She never worked 'outside the home'. She lives in the south of Shetland.

Maria

Maria is 36 and moved to Shetland from south America. She is married with a young family. Before having children, she worked in various capacities, and now works a few hours a week. She participates in croft work.

Marjory

Marjory is 53 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She moved to the croft which she now occupies upon marriage to her husband, who was later assigned the croft. She lives in central Shetland and has adult children. She participates in croft work and has several jobs, including cleaning and caring.

Mary

Mary is 72 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She lives on the west coast of Shetland and has adult children. She has never worked 'outside the home', but continues to knit for money. When younger, she participated in croft work to a high degree.

Matty

Matty is 96 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She lives in central Shetland and has adult children. She participated in croft work to a high degree when she was younger, and has always knitted, continuing to earn some money from this occupation. She has never worked 'outside the home'.

Mimie

Mimie is 85 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She grew up on a croft but moved to a different croft upon marriage, which was later assigned to her husband. She has adult children, and continues to derive some income from knitting. She worked for a couple of seasons at the herring gutting before she was married, and lives in the south of Shetland.

Netta

Netta is 60 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She works part time in the health service sector, and has done so most of her life, except when her family were young when she worked a knitting machine at home. She lives in the west of Shetland and continues to participate in croft work.

Patti

Patti is 41 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She participates to a high degree in croft work and describes herself as taking a greater interest in the croft than her husband. She

has teenage children and works part time at a fish processing factory. She lives on the west coast of Shetland.

Peggy

Peggy is 72 years old and comes from a Shetland crofting background. She no longer participates in crofting, but continues to knit. She has worked part time as a school cook and has adult children. She lives in the north of Shetland.

Rhoda

Rhoda is 45 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She is married with a teenage family and works part time in the service provision sector. She participates in croft work and lives in the south of Shetland.

Ruby

Ruby is 65 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She no longer participates in croft work, but has done to a high degree in the past. She is widowed with adult children, and has worked as school cook as post mistress. She lives in the north of Shetland.

Stella

Stella is 66 years old and is from a Shetland crofting background. She participates to a high degree in croft work and is involved in crofting at a political level. She has adult children and has worked in the service provision sector. She lives in central Shetland.

Appendix 4:

Shetland agricultural trends

	1971	1981	1991	1996	1998	1999
Cattle	6945	5103	5701	6224	6206	6028
Sheep	264779	297558	387468	399162	424312	420547
Poultry	12950	8672	4428	4182	4276	4893
Pigs	9	83	28	123	213	217

Appendix 5

Employment by sector statistics for Shetland 1971-1999

	Men	Women
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	490	280
Energy	340	20
Manufacturing	500	360
Construction	800	380
Distrib., hotels, restuarants	980	1220
Transport & communications	1070	230
Finance, insurance, etc.	330	280
Public admin., education, health	660	2210
Other services	310	450

Appendix 6

Women's employment levels in Shetland from 1971-1999

	1971	1981	1991	1999
Nos. of women employed	8895	11331	11163	11894
Percentage of women employed (of total female population)	27.7	45.9	52.5	64

Appendix 7

Abbreviations

ABDS	Agricultural Business Development Scheme
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBGLS	Crofters Buildings Grants and Loans Scheme
CCAGS	Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (Scotland) Scheme
CPS	Countryside Premium Scheme
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Areas
EU	European Union
HIDB	Highlands and Islands Development Board
HLCA	Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance
LFASS	Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme
MLURI	Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
NFU	National Farmers Union
OAS	Organic Aid Scheme
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RSS	Rural Stewardship Scheme
SIC	Shetland Islands Council
SCFWAG	Shetland Crofters and Farmers Wildlife Advisory Group
SCU	Scottish Crofters Union
SERAD	Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department
SOAFED	Scottish Office Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment Department
UHIMI	University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute
ZCC	Zetland County Council

Appendix 8

Glossary of dialect terms

Aye	always
Blaand	liquid by-product of the churning process which was a popular beverage
Caa	round up sheep
Caddy	orphan lamb
Cockramin	cock-crow-meat – tea and oatcakes eaten by women in early hours of the morning
Dell	dig, using the traditional Shetland method
Girse	grass (or may specifically relate to hay, as in hay-girse)
Haaf	deep sea fishery
Hairst	autumn/ harvest time
Hap	small knitted shawl
Kirn-milk	by-product of the churning process with the consistency of soft cheese
Kishie	carrying basket which was strapped across the back
Kye	cattle
Roo	to pluck the wool from Shetland sheep
Slip	to let loose
Tick	thatch
Trow	Shetland word for ‘troll’, ‘little folk’ with magical properties
Voar	spring/ sowing time
Win	come
Wrought	worked

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